

Beyond Disbelief

Children's Past Lives and the Continuum of Personality

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I. The Foundation

I'm convinced. Without a doubt, the best evidence for the continuation of consciousness beyond death is the *spontaneous past life memories of very young children*.

The children are remembering being here before, in other bodies, as distinct individuals. Which means, therefore, that some form of identity—a cluster of personality, memory, emotion—survives bodily death and travels full circle to be reborn: the working definition of *reincarnation*. It's a natural phenomenon, supported by thousands of cases reported all over the world, from all cultures, regardless of religious beliefs—including Western cultures that *don't* believe in reincarnation.

I'm convinced from working directly with American families, counseling parents whose children are spontaneously remembering and acting out a past life. I've collected scores of cases. These cases contain plenty of hard evidence—statements, behaviors, and birthmarks—that can't be explained except by reincarnation.

But my objective, when I started, was *not* to compile evidence for reincarnation. It was, instead, to learn and understand the phenomenon of children's past life memories well enough to be able to help the parents, to advise and guide them when their child suddenly begins talking about “when I died.”

Another reason I was driven to collect cases is because they are so fascinating. Working with these families, I'm privy to the most astonishing true stories I've ever heard, full of intense human drama, deep emotion, meaning and mystery. They're as moving as any novel, yet set against the backdrop of ordinary American families going about their lives.

Now, my objective is to share these stories, to reach as many people as possible so that they, too, can experience the wonder and amazement I feel. These children are pulling back the curtain on one of the perennial mysteries of human experience—what happens after death.

Evidentially

For all these reasons, I've devoted the last 33 years to collecting cases, writing and speaking about children's past life memories. To share what I learned, I wrote *Children's Past Lives* (1997), the first book ever to offer practical advice for parents. It's a handbook, but also the first book to focus in any depth on how children's past life memories can *heal*.

As a follow-up, I wrote *Return from Heaven* (2001), the first book devoted exclusively to same-family reincarnation. Same-family cases are surprisingly common and yield penetrating insights into how reincarnation works.

Both books together have been published in 22 foreign editions and 19 languages.

I founded the Reincarnation Forum in 1997, the most comprehensive online community devoted to reincarnation. It has served all these years to provide support and practical advice for parents who find themselves suddenly dealing with past life memories in their own children.

Though collecting evidence wasn't my original intention, in retrospect I was collecting evidence all along. And in retrospect, I've created a new approach to researching children's past lives that entails documenting the whole story in each case, incorporating the emotional and personal aspects of the phenomenon along with the empirical evidence. This amounts to a new type of holistic evidence for children's past life memories—and for reincarnation.

Three decades later, through my books, the Forum, lectures and workshops, I've attracted hundreds of cases, big and small. Some of the cases I've found—including the James Leininger case—are the best-known American cases, comparable to the full, evidential cases of Ian Stevenson.

— Frame —

Dr. Ian Stevenson was the first to recognize the potential of children's past life memories as evidence for reincarnation. He's the founder of a rigorously scientific approach to researching the phenomenon. For anyone who takes the time to study his work carefully, there is no explanation for the knowledge these very young children display other than reincarnation.¹

Most people who know of Stevenson have read summaries of a few of his cases and are familiar with his short-form bio: Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, the staggering volume of cases (2600) and writings he published (300 publications, including 14 books), his reputation for exhaustive methodology, and his constant and daring travel to remote locales, such as rural India, to find cases.

Yet, for all of Stevenson's prominence, I'm surprised how many people miss the story behind the story. They aren't aware of his intellectual journey and how he arrived at children's past life memories as his life's work. It means something when someone with his intellect and drive dedicates his life to one narrow field, a field he invented.

Following the choices Stevenson made early in his career, his reasons for each choice, and how he framed the questions, gives us confidence that children's past life memories really do supply the best evidence for the continuation of consciousness.

Pioneer Path

All his life Stevenson was an iconoclast, an intellectual rebel, not afraid to alienate his peers in the medical establishment if he didn't agree with them. He credits this to a lifelong habit of voracious reading in *all* fields, not just science and medicine. His reading in history, in particular, convinced him of the transience of ideas: how every age is convinced that their truths are an absolute given, only to be renounced and replaced in the next age by a new conception of reality. He admitted in 1989: "For me, everything now believed by scientists is open to question, and I am always dismayed to find that many scientists accept current knowledge as forever fixed."²

Dr. Stevenson began to diverge from the reductionist paradigm as early as medical school, when he decided "to devote myself to something more than the study of parts and to something closer to the whole human being." He zeroed in on the question of how the mind influences the body³. His path took him from traditional medical research, to studying psychosomatic medicine, to inspecting then rejecting Freudian psychoanalysis and behavioral psychology (both of which he dismissed as misguided and unscientific). He objected to the reductionist frame for medicine as overly narrow and not supported by the facts. It upset him that his science colleagues filtered out evidence that didn't fit their theories.

Unlike other medical researchers who were hunting to isolate causes *within* the body, he was intrigued to explore how disease can be affected by the *mind* as an entity *separate* from the body. To the medical establishment, this is heresy, a transgression of the fundamental premise that the mind is merely a consequence of nerve activity in the brain.

His dissatisfaction with prevailing theories of mind and body led him to read the literature of psychical research. He was searching for clues in cases of extrasensory perception and in phenomena suggesting survival after death, such as apparitions, near-death experiences, and mediumship. He conducted and published research in all these areas.

To guide his search, he settled on the question: "*What survives bodily death?*"

Children

In the course of his reading, Stevenson discovered scattered reports in obscure publications of young children who spontaneously expressed memories of a previous life. He found a total of 44 cases going back to the mid-19th century and saw an opportunity to consolidate these cases as evidence for what survives bodily death. A systematic study of children's past life memories had never been attempted before.

In 1961 he traveled to India to investigate a new case he had heard about. Word got around that he was coming, and people met him with fresh leads. Within weeks he had twenty-five new cases; within three years he had 400. This was the beginning of the project that occupied him until his death in 2007.

Looking to young children to supply evidence for reincarnation is a brilliant contribution to the field of parapsychology. Before, virtually all paranormal research had been done with adults. But experiments with adults always introduce some doubt because adults bring their experience, all they've been exposed to and know, to any experiment. It's impossible to rule out all influences or ulterior motives. But with very young children, it *is* possible to know everything they've been exposed to. Plus, limiting the research to *spontaneous* memories minimizes any chance that the results are colored by adult intervention or design.

Here was evidence for what survives bodily death *and* what re-emerges at birth. Stevenson recognized this could lead to answers not only to his original questions around psychosomatic medicine, but also to the mysteries of personality development. He proposed that our personalities and physical traits are the product of not just two factors—nature (genetics) and nurture (environment)—but of three factors: nature, nurture, *and* reincarnation.

— Foundation —

Ian Stevenson was the founder of children's past life memories as a formal field of research. He innovated methods and protocols for compiling evidence, modeling the methods of medical researchers and borrowing field techniques from branches of science that study natural phenomena not conducive to controlled lab experiments, such as weather, earthquakes, and volcanoes. He was first to put a priority on interviewing subjects in person, emulating techniques used by lawyers to prepare evidence acceptable in a court of law.⁴ He built a worldwide network of researchers who collaborated with him to scout new cases and apply his methods.

His entire design had the objective of frustrating skeptics, anticipating every possible avenue they might use to discredit a case. He even explores the possibility of ESP and spirit possession—topics he knew well.

He created the template for how the cases are written for publication: fully detailed, academic style, with every possible variation, exception, ramification, and potential flaw meticulously disclosed. In his write-ups, he describes every step of his process and invites the reader to scrutinize his methods, not just the results.

His methods were so successful, they are venerated to this day by researchers as the correct approach to researching children's cases, almost to the point of orthodoxy.

Stevenson defined terms to avoid confusion—a problem when discussing two interlocking lifetimes⁵.

Subject = the child with the memories

Previous personality = the deceased person the subject is remembering being

Verified = a case where all normal explanations for the child's statements and behaviors—no matter how improbable or absurd—have been eliminated

Solved = a case where the child gives enough detail to identify the previous personality and, upon investigation, the facts the child gave are verified

A solved case is the gold standard. Stevenson has more than 895 solved cases in his files.

Patterns

Another innovation is the extent to which Stevenson isolated and analyzed prominent features of the cases—the patterns that we researchers now take for granted. The primary patterns are:⁶

Ages of the children

Spontaneous memories first emerge on average between the ages of two and five, and fade between the ages of five and seven. Only rarely do vivid memories persist into adulthood.

Statements

Statements are anything the subject says that display unexplainable knowledge of a past life, including descriptions of objects, events, relationships, and names of people and places. A high percentage make statements about a sudden and traumatic death.

Stevenson verifies the subject's statements through multiple interviews with family and villagers who witnessed the statements directly and, when possible, he returns months or

years later for followup interviews. In many of his published cases he tabulated dozens of verified statements—some have as many as 50!

All cases considered as evidence must have at least a few statements pointing to a past life.

Behaviors

Behaviors include anything *other* than direct statements that can be observed about the child and for which there is no normal explanation. They can be anything: mannerisms, likes, dislikes, habits, talents, fears, obsessions, quirks of personality, unlearned skills, unconventional tastes in food.

Behaviors add strength to the evidence because they can't be explained by overhearing a conversation or by cryptomnesia.⁷

A special type of behavior are *phobias*—extreme fears that can't be explained by anything that happened in the child's present life. Stevenson found that 36% of his subjects had a phobia that corresponded to the way they died⁸.

Most, but not all, cases have some behaviors that correspond to the statements.

Birthmarks & Birth Defects

Birthmarks are scar-like marks found on the subject's body at birth that correspond to wounds, scars, or fatal injuries on the previous personality's body. These are not just moles, but puckered or depressed tissue that look like scars. Birth *defects* are vary rare and thus offer even more dramatic evidence. They include missing limbs, fingers, and other gross distortions of the body.

Birthmarks figure prominently in 35 percent of Stevenson's solved cases (309 of 895).⁹

Some of the children have two or more birthmarks that match two or more wounds or scars on the deceased, greatly multiplying the odds against random coincidence. Most astounding are the double birthmarks matched to fatal gunshot wounds. Stevenson counts 14 cases where the child's body shows both a small, round birthmark that matches exactly the size, shape, and location of the entrance wound and a larger, irregular birthmark that corresponds to the exit wound where the bullet and bone fragments tore a larger, irregular hole¹⁰.

Stevenson placed great importance on birthmarks because they are *physical evidence for the link between past and present lives*. No matter how strong the verbal and behavioral evidence in a case, critics will find fault with the data. But birthmarks and birth defects—especially when they can be matched to medical records of the deceased—are irrefutable, tangible evidence. In 1997 he published a weighty, two-volume, 2268-page tome called *Reincarnation and Biology*, devoted exclusively to this phenomenon, including 225 solved cases.

One of my most prized possessions is the set of *Reincarnation and Biology* that Dr. Stevenson gave me on one of our visits together. He inscribed it “To a cultural revolutionary.”

— Question —

For anyone who takes the time to read his published work, Stevenson has settled the matter.

But the matter is not settled. Despite his hero status in paranormal circles, he’s not well known generally. Most people have never heard of Dr. Ian Stevenson, let alone read any of his books. His work gets scant mention in the media. If the purpose of research is to change minds on the basic questions of life, death, and reincarnation, he’s not getting the job done with the general public, especially in America and other Western countries.

He’s not moving the needle with the science community either. Despite his impeccable credentials and high standards, mainstream science still relegates his publications to the paranormal bin¹¹.

At my lectures I often ask for a show of hands from anybody who has read anything by Stevenson. These are people who have self-selected for an interest in children’s past lives. Yet I rarely see more than a few hands go up.

Why isn’t Stevenson better known? I have some theories.

Academic style

Stevenson wrote in a dense academic style fit for his academic audience. I’ve read most of his books. They’re dense, a chore to read. And in hewing to the academic style, his descriptions are objective, clinical, impersonal—even when describing children and families coping with life-changing emotions.

Little outreach

His books and scholarly articles were published by university presses. Stevenson himself rarely gave interviews, and did virtually no TV because he didn’t trust journalists not to sensationalize his work, and he was tired of being challenged by critics who didn’t read his cases carefully, if at all.

Misses the whole story

When writing up his cases, Stevenson features the verifiable facts and arguments but filters out most of the narrative details—the details needed to bring the story to life and make it relatable to non-scientists. This evidence-only approach misses reporting the rest of the story that’s swirling around the child. People don’t share proofs, they share stories.

Only stand-alone cases

Stevenson filters for the size of cases, too. He passes over small or slightly flawed cases in favor of those with enough facts to stand alone as evidence¹². This sets the example for others, including journalists, to get in the habit of assessing single cases, scrutinizing each detail. If a small case has only a few statements, “it’s not a real case.”

This is why Stevenson-style researchers maintain “you can’t find good cases in America.” (Spoiler alert: it’s not true.) American cases are weak, they say, devoid of proper names or enough facts to be worth pursuing as evidence of reincarnation.

Foreign cases

When Stevenson was asked in a rare magazine interview to give the criticism most frequently leveled at his work, he answered “[*Because*] the cases occur most where people already believe in reincarnation¹³”

He collected cases in Asian and Middle-Eastern cultures that believe in reincarnation because that’s where the best cases are most readily found. But this means, from a Westerner’s point of view, these cases are easily dismissed as something that happens far away in strange lands to people not like me. This is probably the biggest reason Stevenson’s awesome proof is not making a difference in America—the dearth of American cases.

II. American Parent

In 1988 I started collecting cases of children's past life memories. I started from scratch, and for the first few years I thought I was the only one doing this research. I didn't know that children's past lives research was a thing, and I had never heard of Dr. Ian Stevenson.

I never imagined I would be finding the elusive Western cases that Stevenson was hoping for. Or designing a new approach to researching children's past lives. Contributing evidence to the argument for the continuation of consciousness never crossed my mind. That's not *why* I started.

I started researching children's past life memories to understand what had happened to my own children. In 1988, both my son and daughter, each as a result of recalling a past life, healed persistent phobias and in my son's case, a chronic eczema.¹⁴

I wondered: If this could happen with *both* of my kids, if the past life memories were that close to the surface, how many other children have these memories? How many parents fail to recognize it when it happens in their own family because they don't know it's even possible? And, because both of my children experienced a healing, how many other children suffering from phobias or nightmares could find relief by acknowledging a past life cause?

Mothers

I started looking for cases in my own community of Asheville, NC. I brought it up when talking to friends, mothers at my kids' school, strangers I met at the food co-op. I easily found parents who were sure their own children had talked about a past life. But they didn't know what to do. There was no book, no organization, no expert to answer their questions.

In 1988 I didn't know what the researchers knew—that good American cases were extremely rare. Which was probably a good thing because I plowed ahead. Funded by whatever I could skim from my grocery money, I placed a reader ad in *Mothering* magazine and soon was getting phone calls and letters from all over the country (this was before email). Before long, I had enough cases to write a couple of articles for national journals, which yielded more cases.

I was excited with every letter, phone call, and email. Each was a unique drama, fascinating in its own way, deeply personal, with peculiar details and original plot twists. Each case was a gem, an opportunity to learn something new.

When I talked to mothers on the phone, (it was almost always the mothers who contacted me, not the fathers), they were relieved to be able to share what was happening with their child. They trusted me and opened up. They knew I understood what they were going through—bafflement, curiosity, wonder. What they wanted, first, was to be assured that they weren't the only ones with children with past life memories. Next, that no harm would come to their child. If their child was grappling with dark feelings from the past, they were grateful for my insight and assurance. We bonded in the quest to figure this out, and we did it together.

I spent a couple years thinking through my growing collection of cases. I was trying to figure out how children's past life memories worked so I could do a better job helping other parents. And maybe, some day, I would write a book.

Then I discovered Ian Stevenson. I saw a single sentence in *Many Lives, Many Masters*, a book by psychiatrist Dr. Brian Weiss, citing a psychiatrist at UVA who documented cases of children's spontaneous past life memories. Immediately, I was on the phone, tracking down Stevenson's books.

What a revelation! Even though my cases were slim in comparison, it was clear we were *describing the same core phenomenon*. Point by point, we were finding the same patterns and features: statements, corresponding behaviors, etc. Stevenson found that 72% of the children he studied recalled how they died¹⁵. This was about the same proportion I was seeing in my cases.

— Patterns in Past Life Cases —

Each case of children's past life memories is unique, but they all share many of the same patterns. Some patterns are present in almost every case. Some are secondary variations and refinements, noticeable as patterns only after absorbing many cases.

All cases have *statements*. Most have corresponding *behaviors*.

Recognitions are a variation of the statements pattern. Phobias, obsessions, prodigious talent, and expert skill are types of behaviors. Some children act out past life memories in their play. An example of a subtle but telling pattern is language progression: Toddlers just learning to speak struggle to communicate what is clear in their minds, but as they begin speaking in full sentences and learn more words, the story fills in.

Because healing happens in enough cases, I consider it to be a primary pattern.

Keep these patterns in mind as you read the cases. See how patterns combine in different ways. Watch all the ways the child's statements and behaviors stir up the adults too, not just the child. Learning to spot the patterns—going beyond just marveling at a few sensational statements and behaviors—is how you plumb the true wealth of these wonderful stories.

Statements

Most often, the first thing that alerts parents to the possibility that their child is remembering a past life is the statements—toddlers blurting out things they couldn't possibly know. These children are very young, some still in diapers, so the parents know everything they've been exposed to.

With just a few words, one little girl expressed a poignant memory of when she was a man: ¹⁶

~The Consumption~

Megan had just turned three. I was washing dishes, and she crawled into her high chair and asked me, "Mom, did I ever tell you about when I was a man named John?" I immediately stopped washing to listen.

"No," I said, "Tell me about it."

She said, "Well, I had a wife named Mary. She died of the consumption."

My first thought was she was just making stuff up. But she actually said "the consumption!"

She talked about Mary and John all the next week. She was always consistent with her story, and very specific, and repeated "the consumption" and kept repeating how *sad* she was. She was sad because Mary couldn't have children and sad because Mary died. She said Mary blamed herself for being too sick to have children.

Then she said, "It will be okay, because I'll see Mary again." I have no idea what she meant by that.

Megan only made a few statements about her life as John, including the obsolete term "the consumption" (the term for tuberculosis until 1882). But this case is deeper than it first appears. How could a three-year-old know about infertility and that it would make a woman sad? She related the story from John's perspective, empathizing with his wife's sadness.

Statements + Behaviors

Here's an example where the behavior, an unlearned skill, came first, before the statements that explained the behavior.¹⁷

~Button~

When Tommy was four he lost a button on his pants and I didn't get around to sewing it on right away. So Tommy got out my sewing basket, found a needle and thread, threaded the needle, and sewed that button on so expertly, I couldn't believe it. I never taught him to sew and he had never even seen me do it.

Amazed, I asked, "Where on earth did you learn to sew buttons?"

"Well, we used to do it on my ship all the time," he answered.

"You were a sailor?"

"Oh, yes." And then he told me about how his ship, which had tall masts and many ropes, would creak in the night while he was lying in his bunk. He's never been on a ship, let alone an old one. How would he know ships creak at night?

This memory presaged Tommy's future career. As an adult, he joined the Navy and went to sea for four years and loved it.

If it weren't for Tommy's statements, his parents never would have known where their four-year-old had acquired the intricate knowledge and dexterity to sew a button. It would have remained a mystery.

~Daisy Pickles~

In this case, the family couldn't see the correspondence between their child's statements and behavior until they chanced on an obscure bit of family history.¹⁸

I was watching a television programme about children's past lives and saw you featured with your son. I would like to tell you about my daughter's, I am sure, past life memories.

When Elizabeth was 2 ½, I was weeding the garden and she asked me what one of the flowers was called. I told her "daisies." She said, "Just like me, daisy pickles!" From that point on, she insisted on being called Daisy Pickles. Our family thought this was cute.

We lived near a military airstrip. Sometimes, when old propeller planes flew over our house, Elizabeth would become hysterical, run into the hallway, lie down, put

her hands over her head and go stiff. I was unable to move her hands from her head, she was so terrified. There was nothing I could do or say to talk her through these episodes. It was strange, since she did not react to other airplane noises, such as helicopters or jet planes—just propeller planes.

By the age of five, when she started school, she stopped calling herself Daisy Pickles.

Then years later, my mother's distant relatives in England sent her a family tree. She came over to my house with a strange look on her face and said she had something to show me. She unrolled the family tree and there staring at us was this: "Daisy Pickles died 1942 in London." We assumed she died from a bombing. None of us knew of Daisy's existence until that moment.

Elizabeth is now 24. She's still disturbed by the propeller planes that fly over our house. She says she feels they are going to come down and hit her and it's like the feeling you get when you have a near miss while driving and your stomach drops.

I hope you have found my story interesting, I still get *goose bumps* just thinking about this.

More than just a story of a cute name, this is an example of correspondence between the mode of death and an inexplicable phobia. If a bomb did kill Daisy Pickles, the last thing she heard was the sound of propeller planes flying overhead.

Recognitions

Recognitions of people and places from the past are a type of statement. When they happen, parents notice immediately because they know who their two-year-old has seen and where they've been.

Here a toddler—*less* than two years old—recognizes two old friends. Unlike so many cases driven by fear, here the emotion is utter delight.¹⁹

~Dee's Delight ~

My grandmother and I were very close. She died when I was a teen, and I missed her terribly. When Dee was born seven years later, I was overwhelmed with feelings of familiarity. I wondered if my grandmother was back as my daughter. Yet, I didn't think of Dee as anyone but my own baby and dismissed my musings as far-fetched.

Things began to change when she started making accurate statements about my grandmother's life.

When Dee was twenty months old, we were shopping for groceries and Dee was sitting in the shopping cart. I had my back turned as I was hunting for something on a shelf when I heard Dee squeal with pleasure. I turned and saw an elderly woman talking to her in a kind voice, 'Aren't you the cutest little girl!'

Dee had a look of sheer delight on her face, and she was waving her arms and feet in the air. If she hadn't been strapped in her seat, she would have jumped into the lady's arms.

Dee squealed, 'Look, Mommy, my old friend is here!'

The way she said it sent a *chill* through me. I looked carefully at this tiny lady who was at eye level with Dee. Suddenly, by her Yiddish accent I recognized her too. It was Mrs. Berger, my grandmother's neighbor for thirty-five years. I hadn't seen her since I was six years old.

Around the same time, I treated Dee to lunch at a department store's tearoom on the mezzanine. It was one of *my* favorite places to visit with *my* grandmother when I was a little girl. As soon as we walked off the elevator, Dee chirped, 'I like this place!'

We sat down and an elderly waitress approached. Dee called out brightly, 'Here comes Helen!'

When the waitress got close enough for me to read her name tag, I saw that Dee was correct. I asked Dee, 'How did you know her name?'

She replied, 'I used to come here when I was big and I remember Helen,' as she beamed at her old friend.

This coming from such a little girl made Helen very uncomfortable. But to me, this was the final confirmation that Dee had been my grandmother.

This next case is another example of recognition of places. Plus, it exhibits a corollary pattern in which a child speaks longingly of a past life occupation and then, as a young adult, chooses to resume that occupation.²⁰

~Prior Friar ~

When John was three, our family visited the holy site of Saint Francis in Assisi, Italy. As soon as we walked onto the grounds, John broke loose and ran ahead of us. When we caught up with him, he was holding the hand of one of the Franciscan friars. The friar told us John had asked him for a tour.

We trailed behind, just close enough to hear the conversation between the friar and our son. John asked to see certain private areas of the chapel, which he couldn't possibly have known about. He was speaking as one who had been there before. The friar caught on to this time warp and gently corrected, "Well, *today* we eat there; well, *now* we sleep in that area, because there are more of us."

When we arrived at the chapel where Francis had his vision, John stood silently for a long time staring at the image of Christ—a highly unusual action for our active three-year-old. By the time John said goodbye to his new friend, we were convinced that he had lived a past life in Assisi. There was just no logical explanation for how he knew so much about the Church and the lives of the friars in a prior time.

When John was in his twenties, he did missionary work and dedicated his life to working with the poor. John's career choice, I believe, was a continuation of his past life as a friar.

Recognitions of people, places, and objects are common in these cases and give us a clue as to how the memories work. The child is *seeing images from the past life*. Images are a component of memory: when we recall people or places from the past, we're seeing mental images. Past life memories work the same way.

Remembering Death

It's shocking when a very young child suddenly pipes up about "when I died." It's particularly unnerving to hear them describe a death from the perspective of the dying person. Liia is representative of the 72% of cases, according to Stevenson's calculations, in which the child remembers how they died.

~Just Like Where I Died!~

I first met Tiiu, Liia's mother, at a friend's potluck dinner. When I told her what I did, she told me her daughter's story.²¹

When Liia was two, we were driving over a bridge that spanned a steep ravine. Suddenly, in a clear and excited voice she said, "Mommy, this is just like where I died!"

I said, "Liia, what are you talking about?"

"I was in my car, and it fell off the bridge into the water and I died."

I was so shocked, I pulled off the road so I wouldn't have an accident. Then I asked her, "Where was Mama?"

"You weren't with me *that* time."

I asked her, "Who was driving the car?"

"I was big, I could reach the pedals."

I wondered how Liia even knew that you drove the car with pedals. She always sat in the back in her car seat and couldn't see what my feet were doing.

I wanted to find out more, but not lead her, and asked, "Then what happened?"

"I didn't have my seat belt on, and I fell out of the car and into the water. I was lying on the rocks. I could feel the rocks on my head. I saw the shiny bridge and bubbles going up." Her eyes gazed upward as she told me this .

At this point in her life, Liia didn't swim, and she never put her face in the water in the tub—she didn't know that bubbles went up. She had never watched television at all; I know because I didn't let her watch until she was older.

For the next year and a half, she talked about this often, with the same detail, never any variation. She was always cheerful and matter-of-fact.

And the amazing thing is that even before she could talk, she always made sure the seat belt was fastened in her car seat before she would ride in the car. Once she had acquired enough language to make demands, she always insisted that everyone else in the car wore seat belts too.

A few years later, Tiiu joined me on stage on *The Oprah Show* to tell her story to twenty million viewers.

— Babe Ruth Was Mean to Me —

This case has two themes. First is the precocious talent. Not only did Christian's talent burst forth as soon as he could walk, so too did his total *obsession* for baseball. Second is the grudge. Christian is equally obsessed with unresolved feelings from a past life feud with a very close friend.

Cathy, Christian's mother, told me this story in a series of emails²².

Since the time he began to walk, Christian insisted on wearing a baseball jersey, pants, and cleats every day. He was never without his toy baseball bat, and he implored his family to pitch balls to him all day and night. He exhausted us with his persistence.

At two years old, not only could Christian hit, catch, and pitch, but he did it with the style and moves of a professional player. No one in our family plays baseball or even watches it on TV. We were baffled by his talent but also worried because he was so obsessed.

I made a video and posted it on YouTube. The video caught the attention of a Hollywood casting agency looking for a young baseball player for a bit part in an Adam Sandler movie and, a few days later, Christian and I were flying to Boston for the filming.

After shooting Christian's scene, Adam Sandler came up to him and joked, "So, can I count on you to hook me up with tickets? What team are you going to play for? The Dodgers?"

Christian shook his head and said, "I *play* for the Yankees."

The next day, as a special treat, I got tickets for a Red Sox-Yankees game at Fenway Park.

As we were walking down the halls of Fenway Park, Christian stopped abruptly. He froze, staring at a large black and white photo of a baseball player on the wall. Next came an outburst that made time stand still. Christian was visibly upset as he waved his little wooden souvenir bat and yelled, "I do not like him! He was mean to me!" He kept repeating "He was mean to me!"

This was not a normal two-year-old tantrum. It was a passionate display of raw emotion. It was clear to anybody within earshot that Christian believed this man on the wall had done him harm. One passerby offered, "This kid is on to something, because Babe Ruth was a real jerk!"

I didn't know anything about Babe Ruth and didn't recognize him in the photo. I tried to stay calm and asked Christian, "Babe Ruth was mean to you?"

Christian shot back, "Yes! Mean, mean, mean!"

He remained so agitated, we had to leave the game after only two innings! The whole episode was bewildering and eerie.

Soon after returning home from Boston, at bedtime just before dozing off, Christian got a very serious look on his face and said, "Mommy, I used to be a tall baseball player."

I replied, "Yes, you *will* be a tall baseball player someday."

He was clearly unhappy with my reply. Exasperated, he stomped his foot and hollered, "No! I was a tall baseball player. Tall like Daddy!"

Trying to hide my shock, I looked Christian in the eye and calmly asked, "You were grown up like Daddy?"

He answered a resounding "Yes!" The look on his face was undeniable—relief that he had finally gotten through to me to make his point.

This was the moment when everything came together. Having this conversation with my son was as shocking as seeing a *ghost* walk through the front door, and just as implausible. It felt like I was falling down a rabbit hole. I found myself straddling the great divide between logic and intuition. The concept of reincarnation is diametrically opposed to my rational thoughts and my religious beliefs, yet my heart was telling me not to ignore what Christian was so desperately trying to tell me."

I continued to struggle with this conflict, and consulted my pastor for guidance. I was crushed by his response. He warned me not to tell anybody about Christian's story for fear of backlash for "denying my faith." He offered to pray for me.

Cathy was desperate to talk to someone and confided in a few close friends. One, a professional baseball player, suggested Cathy contact me.

She emailed me in November, 2011. I assured her there was nothing wrong with Christian and answered her questions. I suggested she keep a journal of everything Christian said and did. I also suggested she find a photo of Babe Ruth's baseball team and show it to Christian, without prompting, to see if he could identify anyone in the photo.

Cathy reported later:

I pulled out a black and white photo of all thirty members of the 1927 Yankees team and handed it to Christian without saying a word. Studying it closely, he pointed to Babe Ruth, "There's dumb Babe Ruth."

Cathy asked, "Are there any players here who don't like Babe Ruth?"

He immediately pointed to a stocky guy with dimples and said with confidence, "Him!"

I asked, "Do you know him?"

He looked into my eyes and said, "That's me."

I searched the Internet and identified the stocky, dimple-faced Yankees player as Lou Gehrig.

Both my husband and I are intrigued by Christians's unexplainable talent for baseball. But we're more worried by his extreme emotions. He keeps talking about how much he hates Babe Ruth. He erupts whenever anyone even says the name. It's clear this is not an act to get attention, because his emotional upset and tears are so very real.

His older sister discovered she could taunt her little brother merely by saying "Babe Ruth." It gets a reaction every time.

Cathy researched the relationship between Gehrig and Ruth. They were best friends, almost like family, since 1925. But after a falling out in 1932, they vowed never to speak again, even though they played on the same team. No one knows if they reconciled before Gehrig died. (Based on Christian's feelings, though, I suspect they hadn't.)

News of Christian's talent spread. A few days after he turned four, he skipped his first day of preschool to throw the ceremonial opening pitch on the first day of baseball season at Dodger Stadium—in front of 30,000 fans.

There is much more to this story. Cathy took my advice, kept a journal, and wrote a book, *The Boy Who Knew Too Much*²³.

Famous Names

Christian's case is a rare instance of a child remembering the life of a well-known public figure. *Very* rare. I've never seen another case with a famous or historic figure. But if it weren't for the fact that Gehrig and Ruth were legends, with Ruth's photo on the wall of Fenway Park, the family never would have known the source of Christian's talent. They would have had to explain it by resorting to labels like "genius" and "prodigy." One has

to wonder, how many prodigies in other fields—e.g., music, math, art—perfected their talent in a past life.

— Patterns Made Practical —

Eventually I had enough cases and confidence in my discoveries to go public. Through a series of synchronicities, I found myself sitting on stage with Oprah on her show in March, 1994, surrounded by some of the mothers I had counseled. Oprah devoted the whole hour to my work. As far as I know, *The Oprah Show* was the first mainstream TV show to feature children's past lives.

In 1997 I published my first book, *Children's Past Lives*, a practical guide for parents—the book I was hoping to find when it first happened to me. I included a whole chapter on Stevenson, making his work accessible to parents for the first time.

The centerpiece of *Children's Past Lives* is the Handbook for Parents. In it are *The Four Signs*²⁴, a checklist parents use to distinguish a true past life memory from a fantasy story. It also includes a list titled *What A Parent Can Do*²⁵, which offers simple instructions for addressing a troubling memory, based on what I learned from counseling parents, combined with my experience as a past life therapist.

In retrospect, I see now that these practical guidelines contribute to the evidence for reincarnation. In the nearly 25 years since they were published, they've been used successfully by untold numbers of families. Their success suggests that my model is correct and accurately reflects the dynamics of spontaneous past life memories in children.

The Reincarnation Forum

In 1997, thanks to the foresight and prodding of my husband Steve, we founded the Reincarnation Forum on this new thing called the World Wide Web.²⁶

People joined immediately. At the time it was a rickety BBS and we had no idea how we were going to manage it. But Heaven sent an angel, Deborah Barr, who joined within the first months and volunteered to help moderate. Deborah has been head moderator ever since (nearly 25 years!) and an essential part of this whole story. She leads our hardworking international team of volunteer moderators, enforces our policies, and keeps things humming.

From the beginning, and to this day, the guiding principle for the Forum is to provide a safe, non-judgmental place where parents can ask for help. Just as I wrote the book I was searching for in 1988, I created the Reincarnation Forum as a place I wished had existed when my own kids sent me into an altered universe.

The Reincarnation Forum was the first online forum dedicated to reincarnation topics. Which means, by dint of perseverance, it's now the oldest. And the biggest. There are more than ten thousand posts from people all over the world, culled, archived and available to read. Hundreds of these threads are significant cases of children's past life memories. The sheer volume of cases, from small snippets to full-blown epics, is an on-going contribution to all the other types of evidence for reincarnation.

Here's how it works. If a parent hears their two-year-old suddenly say "a man shot me" or "my *other* Mommy had black hair," they can post their story, no matter how fragmented or sketchy. Sometimes there isn't enough to go on, and the moderators gently say so. Often there's enough substance for the moderators to offer the parents suggestions and assurances, following the templates in my books. Lots of questions answered, problems solved, with members joining in to help.

Every so often we watch a full-blown case unfold. Moderators and members jump in, help do research, add their own commentary. The more complex or sensitive cases are referred to me.

I'm proud of the Forum. It has exposed tens of thousands of people to children's past lives. It brings the phenomenon out into the open and makes it accessible and interactive. People discuss the ins and outs of children's spontaneous past life memories as something that happens all the time. Yet they still marvel at the surreal mystery of it all.

— The Soul of a Fireman —

This is one of the best American cases I've ever seen. It's a solved case. But with a catch: only the mother, Melissa, and I know the identity of the previous personality, for reasons that will become clear²⁷.

BabyRN

Melissa's first post on the Reincarnation Forum in September, 2007, (using the handle *BabyRN*) began as so many others do. She confessed she was nervous because she had never shared this story publicly. She searched the Internet for "children with past life memories" and found our Forum. She was glad she found us: "It makes me feel better knowing someone else is experiencing this too. I know there are a lot of people who are skeptical, so this Forum is the first place where I feel OK talking about it."

Her three-year-old son, Matt, knew all the technical details of firefighting in New York City. They live in California. Forum moderators and regulars are accustomed to seeing

fascinating cases, but the scope and intensity of this case kept them buzzing for more than a year.

From a very early age, Matt was obsessed with firefighting. He got up every morning, put on his firefighter outfit (his reward for potty training), and told me he's going to work. He took his play axe and chopped at the walls because, he said, there was fire behind them.

When anybody asked him if he wanted to be a firefighter when he grew up, he said, "No, I *am* a firefighter."

His room is set up like a fire station, everything according to where he says it goes. He has lined up four fire hats in *my* bedroom, because, he says, we could get to them more quickly in a fire. He told me that he needs a *real* air tank and a *real* axe for his fire station, because his play ones don't work!

Matt is very protective of his family. He puts on his fire boots and hat every night before bedtime, goes into his sister's room, shines his flashlight around, and announces, "All clear." Then they're both happy and she goes to sleep.

He asked, "How am I supposed to rescue everyone if I can't get out my own door?" So my husband made an escape plan for him, and they went through a drill so he'd know where to go. That made him feel better.

A lot of his comments make me laugh. Tonight he told me he likes to drive through red lights with the sirens on when he doesn't actually have to, and then he laughs. He also told me that I would really enjoy the Christmas parties at his fire station because everyone always has lots of fun. He said once they made popcorn and when the popcorn burned they took it outside and sprayed it with fire hoses. He thought this was hilarious!

He tried to give me directions to his fire station—which was funny coming from a three-year-old. He said, "You take a left, then a right, and his station is on the left".

But that's just the beginning. He knows everything about firefighting. He talks about it all the time. But only when he wants to, and in spurts. If I ask him questions he laughs and says, "Why are you asking me this? You know I know the answers." When he does talk about firefighting, his voice changes—he's serious and matter-of-fact.

I was uncomfortable at the beginning, but now I'm confident that this is from a past life. There's no way he could know all of this at age three. We have no

firefighters in the family. Nobody I know is a firefighter. I'm a nurse, but I've been a stay-at-home mother with my kids. I know what Matt has seen.

Things shifted when one evening before bedtime, when Matt was three, I was reading him *Curious George in the Big City*. A cartoonish drawing of the Manhattan skyline showed skyscrapers with the Twin Towers and the Statue of Liberty in the background.

Matt pointed to the Twin Towers and said very matter-of-factly, "Bad men knocked those buildings over."

Then he said, a little agitated, "Planes broke them. I couldn't help. People jumped because they wouldn't wait for me to get them. I was stuck. I was on the floor with my breathing mask on and used my axe to break a hole in the wall so I could get the people out because they're calling for help. I couldn't help. I couldn't get the people out."

How did my four-year old know about the 9/11 tragedy? I was dumbfounded. We never talked about it or looked at pictures. I noticed a change. When he only talked of the technical aspects of firefighting, he didn't show any emotion except worrying about protecting his family. But now, he was clearly upset.

Fire Rescue

When Forum regulars join a discussion, they're generous with their help. They often lend insight drawn from their special interests, vocations, and experience and do extra research. In this case, Jeff Keene, a retired Assistant Fire Chief from Connecticut, joined in. Jeff confirmed not only Matt's uncanny technical knowledge of firefighting, but also that Matt had the sense of humor, language, swagger and selflessness of a professional firefighter.

Here are some of the statements BabyRN posted, followed by Jeff's comments in bold.

Matt insisted that he's not a firefighter, he's "fire rescue."

I had to laugh when your little one said he was not a firefighter, he's fire rescue. He was in a Rescue Unit. That is exactly the way they talk. Fire Rescue are the elite of the FDNY.

They got a new fire truck because their old one was wrecked. He said this several times, and that the new one has a TV in it and a boat on top.

He is right on the money about the truck. The TV screen might be a computer terminal. Some have small boats because they do water rescue—Manhattan is an island!

He loves to talk about his bucket truck, and how he rides in the bucket, with two levers, one for the bucket to go up, and one to make it go down, and he engages the levers to spray water from the bucket. He said the bucket bounces a little as it reaches the bottom.

Yes, if the levers are not operated very smoothly, there is a bounce. And there are levers to work the bucket and levers to open the gates to flow water to the ladder-pipes.

He is sure that his hat is black with a yellow stripe, and that he has a picture of a wolf with a moon on his truck, and always refers to the truck as "his." He rides in the front of the truck, but he's not a chief.

FDNY helmets are black with reflective tape on them so they can be seen better at night.

When he says, "his," he means his—I know the feeling well. My guess is that he was a Lieutenant or Captain of a company, and would assume the passenger seat in the cab.

He told me how firemen follow the leader in a line in a fire and if someone falls out of the line, he uses a bright light and sometimes a camera to find them, and then makes them say, "cheese."

Yes, many times they are in a line and they do have high-powered flashlights. If a man becomes separated they find him with a thermal imaging camera. Say "cheese"—I love it! That's just the way firefighters act.

He said he's also a scuba diver and talks about his "gear." Recently someone gave him flippers and a mask as a present. He put them on, walked backwards and jumped into the pool backwards, saying, "See, this is how you do it."

He's correct. Anything a fireman wears on the job is "gear." Many of the Rescue company are SCUBA divers and going in backwards is how you do it. Even if he saw this on TV, it takes courage to dive backwards. He's done it before.

He has said people were falling from a building because they wouldn't wait. He said he was on the floor with his breathing mask on and used his axe to break a hole in the wall so he could get the people out.

No, Baby, they were not falling, they were jumping. It was not that they wouldn't wait. They couldn't wait. You tell him that for me. (Sorry, had to take a tissue break.)

One of the worst things you can do to a firefighter is make him feel helpless. They all felt helpless on 9/11.

I don't see any way he could not have been a firefighter, seeing his knowledge of all the little nuances of the job. But his feelings, his deep concern to help people, that's a

real firefighter! He is a firefighter deep in his heart and soul.

In a follow-up email with Melissa, she told me Matt still talks about his concern for the people he couldn't help, but not as often. "Maybe he released something. He's always been a shy boy, but lately he's been acting like the other crazy four-year-olds in his class."

Too Much Evidence

As the evidence mounted and Matt remembered more explicit details of his former life, Melissa started to get nervous that she might be sharing *too* much on the Forum. The Forum regulars were *too* effective at tracking down information. And a couple researchers, not Forum regulars, had already approached her to engage in formal interviews (trolling for cases is prohibited on the Forum).

She decided to stop posting any details that might identify the fireman Matt remembered being. She didn't want anyone notifying the former family or the firefighters from his station. I supported her decision. This story, if it got out, would be a big story with lots of media scrutiny because 9/11 was a recent and collective trauma. It wasn't the same as tracking down a previous personality who died in the Civil War, or as a pilot in 1945. This firefighter's family was still grieving.

We continued to communicate through email and she shared privately the details that she was withholding from the Forum. Together, we positively identified the previous personality just from information available online. This was a "solved" case. But only the two of us knew.

Melissa found the firefighter's obituary and online tributes. The tributes were filled with facts that matched details Matt had given about the private side of his former life. We positively identified the family. In the tributes, they wrote how comforted they were to know that their beloved hero son is now their guardian angel looking over them from Heaven. We could imagine how disruptive it would be if somebody informed them that their angel actually reincarnated as a young boy in California.

One of the tributes included an eye-witness account from the last firefighter to see "Matt" alive. He recounted how he was running down the stairs in one of the Towers, saw "Matt" and yelled that they had orders to get out immediately. "Matt" told him to go ahead, he would catch up—as soon as he got the people out who were calling for help.

Now that we know how Matt died, it's clear why he was so obsessed in his early play with trying to break down the walls in his house "because there was fire behind them." He was re-enacting his last moments. He had unfinished business: saving the people trapped behind the wall.

III. Healing Past Life Trauma

In 1998, after my first book was published, Dr. Stevenson invited me to meet with him at his office in Charlottesville.²⁸ Steve and I drove down from Philadelphia. I was thrilled to finally meet the man whose work I had studied and admired for eight years. He welcomed us graciously and gave us a tour of the office. I was awed by the rooms full of file cabinets holding all his cases and research notes—the source files for the very cases I had been studying.

Dr. Stevenson invited me into his office for a private chat. This was my opportunity to ask the one question I had been burning to ask, something that had always puzzled me. “Dr. Stevenson, in all of your research, you never mention anything about the *healing* effects of remembering a past life. Surely you’ve seen it in your cases.”

He looked at me sternly and said, “There is no evidence for it. You can never prove a direct cause and effect.”

I countered, “Well, actually there *is* evidence for it.”

He listened politely as I reviewed my cases where children were healed of phobias and nightmares, including some new cases not in my book. He was unmoved. We both let it slide, and he asked me what new cases I was working on. I told him about a new case from Virginia and we agreed to investigate it together.

On the drive back home, I processed what had just happened. Dr. Stevenson was generous with his time and was clearly interested in my work. It was a memorable day. But his blunt denial of healing surprised me. The potential for healing was one of the first features that caught my attention when I started collecting cases. I thought that, with all of the cases he had seen, he must have documented at least a few in which phobias disappeared after the child talked about their traumatic death—even if he hadn’t written about it. He documented the phobias, but not the healing. Why?

I understood from his writings how Stevenson concentrated on finding verifiable facts—statements, behaviors, and birthmarks—that could withstand the attacks of critics. But after today, I saw that he draws a hard line around the aspects of the phenomenon he considers worth researching: hard evidence, facts that can be isolated and verified. Healing is outside the line, so he left it out of his investigations.

Clearly, we saw these cases differently. I'm looking through the lens of a parent whose own children were healed from recalling a past life, and as a trained counselor and past life therapist who has seen the healing power of past life memories hundreds of times.²⁹ He's focusing narrowly on evidence. My wider view takes in all aspects of the phenomenon. And from what I see, healing is just as important as compiling evidence.

The Moment of Death

Many children suffer from conditions that doctors struggle to explain: severe nightmares, phobias, and flashbacks that have no apparent cause and no medical solution. The parents, perplexed and powerless to relieve the suffering, are desperate for explanations. They fabricate theories to blame themselves. They hope and pray the condition will go away.

But if they're fortunate enough to hear their child describe a past life death, they have an opportunity to stop the suffering. The healing, when it happens, can be surprisingly quick. How it works seems a miracle.

Yet it's not a miracle. Healing spontaneous past life memories in children works in very much the same way as healing in adults through past life therapy. What's the *same* is the underlying principles for reversing the effects of past life trauma. What's *different* is that for the children, the trauma manifests spontaneously and can be healed in the moment—without hypnosis or special skill.

Psychiatrists and psychologists discovered the efficacy of past life therapy more than fifty years ago. It's well documented and explained in dozens of theoretical and practical publications. When their patients present issues that resist conventional therapy or medical treatment, they test for a past life origin. If they find one, the cure can sometimes be a single therapy session.

The underlying principle of past life therapy is to treat the moment of death as a *psychological* event. Thoughts and emotions that occupy the mind at the moment of death are somehow energized and imprinted on the soul, and then persist to influence thoughts and feelings in a subsequent life. Traumatic, violent deaths leave the most durable imprints. It's similar to the way *post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)* works in this life—a single violent event from battle, sexual assault, or a bad accident imprints on the mind and inflicts torment for years.

Also, because a traumatic death is a sudden death, the person dies burdened with “unfinished business of the soul.”³⁰ The unfinished business usually involves relationships. There's no time to say goodbye, make amends, resolve differences, or come to peace with deep torments.

Past life therapists use hypnosis to guide the patient to access and re-experience the past life death and bring to conscious awareness all the thoughts and feelings that were imprinted at the moment of death, which releases their hold on the psyche. The last step, with the guidance of the therapist, is to affirm that all the feelings—regrets, guilt, sadness, and terror—are in the past, belong in the past, and can be left behind.

Nobody knows exactly how it works, but it does. The founders and pioneers of past life therapy (the people I trained with) confirmed many times over that these techniques work. I've seen it thousands of times in my own past life therapy practice over the past thirty years. I've watched clients go through every possible gruesome and traumatic death, confront every imaginable type of unfinished business, and then enjoy profound and lasting healing. Some come to me as a last resort for problems that eluded traditional therapies.

The Continuum of Personality

Interestingly, many of my adult clients reveal that the past life memories we summoned with hypnosis had first emerged spontaneously in childhood. But they weren't acknowledged or processed at the time, and the effects persisted into adulthood.

Piecing together what I know about healing *both* children and adults, it's clear that the same forces are at work, just at different stages of life. I find it useful to think of the cycle of consciousness—from death to birth, childhood to adulthood, to death and again to birth—as one continuum, rather than discrete stages that mark abrupt changes in a person's makeup. I call this cycle the *continuum of personality*.

Pure consciousness, and all it carries, is the common thread. But it appears differently at different stages of life: close to the surface in young children, layered over and complicated by life experiences as children grow into adults, and re-launching as pure consciousness at death, ready for another round.

I'm convinced that if we view personality as a continuum, it could serve as a unifying model, useful for understanding the links between past life memories and medical and psychological issues. It could change how we diagnose and address these issues. Instead of always searching for present-life causes, traditional and non-traditional healers alike might look back to earlier stages in the continuum for clues to the source of the problem.

Accepting the *continuum of personality* paradigm could also serve to displace *rasa*—the theory that children are born as blank slates, empty vessels, shaped only by experience. This could open the door to new thinking, new research, and answers to many puzzling questions about personality development. Goodbye *tabula rasa*.

— Parents Seize the Moment —

Parents can help their own children process a traumatic past life memory. They don't need to know anything about past life therapy, and hypnosis is not involved.

Indeed, they're in the best position to help their own children. Because a child's past life memories are so close to the surface, they can burst forth at any time, triggered by something the child sees, hears, feels, or tastes that reminds them of something particular from their past life. Parents are likely to be on the scene when this happens. And because the memories are so close to the surface, they are remarkably easy to address.

Some parents figure it out on their own. They open up and listen to what their child is trying to tell them, follow their intuition, tune in to the energy of the moment, and handle it perfectly.

Others need only a little guidance and encouragement. If given a few steps to follow and some idea of what to expect, they gain confidence, learn to trust the process, and act. This is the primary message in my books and the guiding spirit of the Reincarnation Forum.

~We Got Our Blake Back~

Blake's case was a milestone for me, the first in which I could test what I had learned up to this point in 1992 about healing children's memories. An anxious Colleen called and explained why she was so worried about her son.³¹

One day, right after watching a garbage truck rumble by our house, Blake, who had just turned three, told me he was hit by a truck.

I assumed he was confused and meant a child had hit him with a toy truck in pre-school. When I questioned him, he said, "No, a real truck. A big truck. The truck hurt me."

Then he started holding his left ear.

Coincidentally, just the day before, I had seen psychiatrist Brian Weiss on *Oprah*. He mentioned that sometimes children spontaneously remember their previous lives, but most parents dismiss what their child is saying, thinking it's just a fantasy story. I took this as a clue to listen carefully.

I asked Blake, "What happened?"

He said, "I went under the wheels." He had a pained look on his face and waved his hand down the left side of his body, showing me where he had been hit.

I asked, "Then what happened?"

"They took me to a big building."

I asked again, "Then what?"

"I died."

"Where were mommy and daddy when this happened?"

He said, "Gone bye-bye at the store."

At first I wondered if Blake could be imagining all of this. But how could a three-year-old envision a truck's wheels running over his body?

I suggested to Blake, "You saw this on TV, right?"

"No!" he exclaimed. He was getting irritated with me because I didn't remember.

"No," he insisted, "it happened on the street!"

I didn't know what to make of this, and I hoped he would forget it. But a week later when a garbage truck passed our house, he told the same story again.

Also, around this time his behavior changed. He became depressed, lost interest in playing, moped around the house. This was a radical change from the usual Blake, who was so cheery we called him "Smiley." He complained about aches and pains on the *left* side of his body. When I tried to comfort him, he would push me away and say, "I love you. I hate you."

I tried to give him extra attention, thinking he felt neglected as the middle child, which made me feel guilty. I took Blake to the doctor, but there was nothing wrong with him. I considered taking him to therapy.

It didn't occur to me that this change in Blake might be connected to what he had told me about dying under the wheels of a truck. It wasn't until a few months later, when we went on a family vacation to London, that I started piecing things together. We were waiting to cross a busy intersection. Blake was in a stroller. Suddenly, he jumped out of the stroller and walked into the path of an oncoming truck. My husband grabbed him by his collar and pulled him off the street just in time.

At that moment something clicked. I wondered if Blake walking in front of a truck had anything to do with his statements about being hit by a truck. Was this some type of re-enactment from the previous life? I was terrified he might try it again.

When they returned from London, Colleen saw my ad in *Mothering* magazine and called. I explained to her that children carry images and feelings from their previous lives into the present. To a very young child, a past life memory is the same as something that

happened days or weeks ago. They don't know they've made a transition into another body.

I asked her to tell me more about what Blake was feeling. She said, "I try to comfort him, but he pushes me away." I wondered if Blake was confusing her with the mother who had "gone bye-bye at the store" when he was killed by the truck. I suggested that Blake needed to know that it wasn't Colleen who had left him alone, it was his *other* mother.

I told her: "Wait until you're alone with Blake and he's relaxed, before bedtime or at bath time. Then acknowledge his memory by letting him know *you* believe he was hit by the truck. Tell him he is now safe in a new body, and you will always protect him. Trust your motherly instincts to find the right words in the moment."

A week later, Colleen called, excited:

You won't believe what happened! I did what you said. I waited until Blake was relaxed, right before bedtime.

I said, "Blake, you were hit by a truck, right?"

He said, "Yes."

I continued, "That was a different life. You were in a different body and you had a different mommy."

As I said this, Blake's face lit up. For the first time in months, he smiled.

He said, "I had a different body? A different mommy?" He seemed genuinely surprised.

I assured him, "Yes, and now you're safe." Then I named all the people in the family who love him. He understood immediately. I actually felt something lift from Blake. *The change was palpable.*

Colleen called me a few days later, elated, to report that Blake had completely returned to his old smiley self. The change was total. All the aches and pains on the left side of his body disappeared.

She thanked me and said, "We got our Blake back."

One Foot in a Past Life

When Colleen told Blake he was in another body, in another family, she did exactly the right thing.

Though hard for us to imagine, some children are confused about which life they're in. They aren't aware that they died and are now in a new body. Because they're closer on the continuum to whatever happened in the past life, it's still fresh in their minds. Past and present lifetimes merge in their awareness, with scenes and feelings from the past overlaying present reality, their perceptions of time blurred, past and present existing simultaneously—and they can't understand why the adults around them don't see it too.

When this happens it's almost always the consequence of a sudden death. They didn't have time to make a clean transition and a part of their consciousness is stuck in the past.

As strange as this sounds, it's just as simple to fix. The child can be recalibrated to the present with a single intervention. It might be accompanied by a catharsis—crying and thrashing about. Usually, as with Blake, it's just talking. The miracle is that clarifying past and present is sometimes all it takes to release *all* troubling emotions and images. The child is finally rooted in the present, instantly, like flipping a switch.

In the days after, if the child continues to talk about the past life, parents may notice a change in verb tense. For example, going from saying “I am a tall baseball player” to “I was a tall baseball player.”

One of my favorite stories that dramatizes this time-overlap pattern is a Stevenson case from Turkey³². When baby Celal Kapan first started to talk, one of his first sentences was, “What am I doing here? I was at the port.” As his language improved, he remembered in great detail his life as a dock worker who, one day, was taking a nap in the hold of a ship when a crane operator accidentally dropped an oil drum on him, killing him instantly. From Celal's point of view, he awoke from his nap stunned to find himself in the body of a helpless child. He didn't know he had died. He thought he was still at the port.

~Mirror Moment~

Laura read my book and used what she learned to heal her daughter's troubling behavior. Then she emailed me to tell me what happened:³³

Helena is our only child.

At eighteen months, she asked where her brother “Jeffrey” was. She talked about Jeffrey often. We assumed this was just her way of telling us she wanted a brother or sister.

One day, around the same time, she was jumping on the couch, fell, and hit her head. She had a soft landing on a wooden floor—no injury, no blood. But she wouldn't stop crying.

As she got older, she became fixated on bumping her head and said often: "Remember when I bumped my head and I slept for a long time? I need to be careful not to hit my head. Remember when I bumped my head really hard?" I thought it was odd she even remembered falling off the couch when she was so young.

She also started actively looking for Jeffrey. She would abruptly stop playing and run to the door to welcome him back. She repeated often that Jeffrey was "so little" and asked where he was. Before going to bed, lost in her thoughts, she talked about Jeffrey.

One day, when Helena brought up Jeffrey, I casually asked, "What does your family call *you*?"

Without hesitating, she answered, "Julia."

Helena had named her first doll Julia. I asked, "Oh, like your dolly's name?"

She replied, "Yeah, that's why I named her that." Her answer was so natural and true, I felt a *chill* in my heart. Things were starting to get real.

Then one day, Helena came back from preschool flustered and upset. She told me a boy fell on the playground and hit his head and bled a little. She was worried about the boy. I assured her he'll be fine, his head will heal.

She ignored my assurances, and said, "That's not what happened to me! When I was Julia, I hit my head and then I was here."

I asked, "How did this happen?"

"I was jumping on my bed and I hit my head really hard," and she pointed to three spots on her head.

When Helena was four, she told me that she didn't want to be ten. I asked why. "Because I die when I'm ten!" To this day, I'm freaked out when I recall that remark.

Around that time, the potty problems began. She refused to pee or poop and started having painful and frequent UTIs and bad constipation because she was holding it all in. We took her to specialists and all of her tests came back normal. No one could help her. This went on for about year. She went from being a calm and delightful little girl to constantly anxious.

At preschool she continued to grow and do well in every activity—except the potty department. She was having daily accidents—four to five changes of soiled clothing a day. Her teacher called me and told me to take her to a psychologist.

Instead, I Googled “children’s past lives” and found your book. I read it and felt prepared to help Helena. I waited until the next time she brought up Jeffrey or hitting her head. We were in her room folding laundry, and out of the blue she said, “Jeffrey can’t talk very well. He’s just a baby.”

I dove right in, not with skepticism or disbelief. I didn’t challenge her. I let her know I believed her. Perhaps she felt the change in me because when I asked, “How old is he?” she looked different.

Helena said, “He was two and so little and funny.”

I followed her lead. “Do you miss him?”

“I do. I don’t know where he went.”

We paused here for a second because, as weird as this may sound, I wanted us to experience that longing together. *We both felt it.*

I waited, then continued: “When was the last time you saw him?”

She spoke seriously, with a detached tone, and said, “The night I bumped my head really hard. It opened in three places,” pointing to the same three places on her head, “and there was blood all over. I fell asleep and woke up here. In my room!”

I grabbed her hand and I took her in front of a full-length mirror. I pointed to her reflection and told her, “This is you, now! You *were* Julia. But you had a terrible accident, and now, you *are* Helena! And guess what? You have a new body! A strong, healthy, and beautiful body.”

I wish I could have captured the expression on her lovely face. She looked in the mirror, and looked at me, and exclaimed, “You’re right! I have a new body!” She looked so excited—as if I had just given her a surprise birthday present.

That was it! She put her folded laundry on the shelf, pulled on her princess dress, and danced downstairs to play. *The energy around us snapped back to an ordinary vibe.*

Now, I’m happy to report that Helena’s potty problems disappeared. No more potty accidents. None! Just like that! Her teachers and pediatrician noticed an immediate difference in Helena’s demeanor and are relieved and surprised. She’s no longer anxious, as if something within her let go. She’s now at ease.

She talks less frequently about Jeffrey. Except, just before going to bed, she tells me she still thinks about her little brother. I can feel her longing for the deep connection they had.

Mystical Energy

There's a moment in Helena's case when Laura said, "I felt a chill in my heart. Things were starting to get real." Later she said, "The energy around us snapped back to an ordinary vibe." And in Blake's case: "I actually felt something lift from Blake. The change was palpable."

I see this pattern in so many cases, I call it the "goosebumps effect." Goosebumps, hair standing on end, chills, mild shock, sudden disorientation, tingling through the whole body, "like touching a live wire."

It happens often at the moment when the child makes the first statement about a past life. The mother is jolted to attention, as much by the shift in energy as by the alarming statement. She knows instantly to listen. It also happens at the moment of healing, as with Blake and Helena. Mother and child share an altered state, an energy bubble that bursts as soon as the moment is over.

This is a common pattern and a feature of spontaneous past life memory that hints at the energetic forces at play. It is just one of a number of satellite phenomena that spark through these stories: synchronicity, telepathy, dreams—all phenomena too subtle and subjective to verify. Yet they point to mystical dimensions we can't ignore if we seek a total, holistic understanding of this transcendent phenomenon.

— James Leininger's Nightmares —

The James Leininger case is the best known American case of children's past life memories.³⁴ It's been featured in documentaries, cited, and widely shared because it's such a compelling story. When I inform people what I do, they light up and ask, "Have you heard of the little boy who remembered being shot down as a WWII fighter pilot?" I answer, "Yes, that's my case."

This was the first of my cases (outside of same-family cases) in which the name and facts of the previous personality could be verified—a solved case. I had been working and waiting for almost fourteen years to find such a detailed case.

I'm not going to retell the case, but I do want to draw attention to the healing aspect. It's at the heart of the story, but often gets upstaged by James's sensational knowledge of WWII warcraft and his obsession with airplanes.

Andrea, Jame's mother, first emailed me in early 2001, and this case commenced as so many others had: a mother, desperate to stop her child's severe nightmares, hears clues of a past life and calls me for help. Also typical were Andrea's first words: "We are not crackpots."

But it rapidly took on a different quality as James remembered more and more accurate details about fighter planes, air battles in the Pacific, and dying in a fiery airplane crash into the sea. He also remembered the names of fellow airmen and the Navy ship they were on—the Natoma Bay. I was part of the team, working directly with Andrea and her husband, Bruce, for eight years, via many emails and phone calls. It was a wild ride. With each new development, we shared in the excitement and the mystery. I urged them to keep a journal.

I had a role in making the case famous, as well. In 2002, when a producer for ABC *Primetime* asked me for my best case, I referred the Leingers to her. I was interviewed along with the Leingers by host Chris Cuomo. In 2004 the episode aired and the public got their first look at "the little boy who remembered being a WWII pilot." I also introduced the Leingers to my literary agent, which culminated in the publication of their book *Soul Survivor* (2009). I wrote the foreword.

The Nightmares

When Andrea first contacted me, she had one thing on her mind: to stop the nightmares plaguing her two-year-old son. The nightmares were severe and frequent. For nine months, three to five times a week, little James woke up crying, screaming, thrashing.

Many parents suffer the hell of unexplained nightmares. But Andrea and Bruce were fortunate because James revealed what the nightmares were about. During these eruptions he said variations on "airplane crash, airplane on fire, airplane crashed in the water, can't get out." During the day he repeated "airplane crash" twenty times a day! As he acquired more language skills, his uncanny knowledge of WWII airplanes convinced Andrea she needed to investigate a past life source for the nightmares. That's when her mother gave her a copy of *Children's Past Lives* and she emailed me.

I briefly counseled Andrea, then encouraged her to follow the guidelines in my book. She did, and reported back: "The effects were immediate. The nightmares went from several times a week, to once a week, to hardly at all."

The dramatic reduction in James's nightmares is, with a sort of reverse logic, the real reason I think this case is so significant. The same overwhelming evidence that proves James was remembering a past life also proves that the cause of his nightmares was the traumatic past life death. Consequently, it confirms that the method used to resolve the nightmares—treating them as past life trauma—is valid.

Disproof

It's common in these cases to see a reincarnation skeptic—most often the father—convert to become a believer. Bruce Leininger is an extreme and well-documented example of this. His story arc goes from “devout Christian” (early on he told me past lives are “total bullshit”), to an evangelist for children’s past life memories. He traces his journey in *Soul Survivor*, confessing all.

Bruce spent hundreds of hours over several years on a quest to *disprove* that James was remembering a past life. He was hoping to reveal historical inaccuracies and mistakes in James’s statements. He inspected each item—for example, that James Huston flew a Corsair—to prove it wrong, on the presumption that disproving one or two items would expose the whole past life premise as a fraud. His obsession, at times, was too much for Andrea: “Frankly, I was tired of Bruce’s endless investigation. There was always just ONE more detail that needed to be nailed down, confirmed—*then* he’d really believe.”³⁵

Bruce failed to disprove his son’s memories. Instead, thanks to his relentless research, he made the case even stronger as each historical fact he tracked down proved true. His perseverance is the reason this case developed to be one of the best American cases.

Recognition

One of my favorite moments in the story is a recognition. After the *Primetime* show aired, Bruce and Andrea took five-year old James to a reunion of the veterans of the Natoma Bay. James was the darling of the reunion, impressing the veterans with his intimate knowledge of the ship and the planes these veterans fought in sixty years before. He recognized some of James Huston’s old buddies—though he confessed to Andrea, “I’m sad everyone looks so old!” He was disappointed, Andrea guessed, because he expected everyone to still be in their 20s.³⁶

At one point, five-year-old James was walking out of a room with his parents when they were met by a man they hadn’t seen before. The man looked down at James and asked, “Do you know who I am?” James looked him in the eye, thought for a second, and replied, “You’re Bob Greenwalt.” The man looked shocked, and said, “That’s right.” Bruce later asked James how he recognized Bob. He said, “I recognized his voice.”³⁷

— Spontaneous Healing —

I was giving a lecture when I heard a woman in the audience crying. I paused, and asked her if she was okay. Patricia, a physician’s wife from Connecticut, wanted to share her story:³⁸

~“My Shot Hurts”~

My baby, Edward, always had trouble swallowing. When he learned to talk, he would point to his throat and complain, “My shot hurts, my shot hurts.” We assumed he was comparing the pain in his throat to getting a shot in his arm, which he hated.

When he was almost four, we discovered a large growth in his throat. A specialist diagnosed a congenital thyroglossal duct cyst, a dangerous tumor prone to infection that had to be removed. We scheduled surgery. But the surgeon required Edward to have a tonsillectomy first and return a few weeks later to have the tumor removed.

Right after the tonsillectomy, Edward said he didn’t need the second operation because his “shot” was gone. We assumed he was still delirious from the anesthesia, so we let him babble on. But his babbling got even stranger.

He told us that when he was big before he was a soldier in France named Walter. He complained he was too young to fight, he was only eighteen—a strange comment from a four-year-old! He said he was constantly cold, hungry, and lonesome. One very cold and rainy day, he and other soldiers were trudging through the mud when a bullet hit him from behind and lodged in his throat. Four-year-old Edward then gave what was, his physician father attested, a clinically accurate description of dying from a bullet wound in the throat—lurid details that very few adults, let alone a four-year-old, would know. He repeated his story word for word over the next few days.

We were baffled by the realism of Edward’s story. How did he know these things?

But we were even more amazed and shocked to discover, three days later, that the tumor had completely disappeared. Edward’s surgeon was most surprised. He admitted he had never heard of spontaneous remission of this type of tumor. He was skeptical and predicted it would return. It never did.³⁹

This is an unusual case of spontaneous healing. No intervention was necessary. The catharsis came when Edward talked about his past life death, possibly enabled by the after-effects of the anesthesia.

Patricia began to cry at the point in my lecture where I was describing how children can be healed by recalling a past life. It touched her deeply when suddenly, and for the first time, all the pieces of her son’s story came together.

IV. Same-Family Reincarnation

After *Children's Past Lives* was published in 1997 and as more people heard about my research from my TV and radio appearances, lectures, and the Reincarnation Forum, the cases poured in. Every one was unique, yet full of familiar patterns.

Yet I started noticing a *new* pattern. I was seeing more and more cases in which the child was remembering being a deceased relative—a grandfather, uncle, mother, sister, brother, or a child who died young. I had seen a few of these *same-family* type cases before, but I thought they were just outliers. Now I was beginning to think they're more common than anyone realized.

I started including same-family cases in my lectures. Each time I did, I would hear audible gasps from the audience as people suddenly realized that their toddler whom they joked was uncannily “just like grandpa,” maybe really was.

I came away from most of my lectures with at least one new same-family case. A good many of the cases that pop up in the Reincarnation Forum are same-family. I suspect if we could take a census of souls and track where they reincarnate, we would be surprised at how many choose to return to the cluster of souls they recently left behind. Which makes sense: if souls have volition, why wouldn't they gravitate to people they know in order to resume the relationship?

~Chattanooga Choo Choo~

Here's an example of a soul returning to continue a loving relationship. Candy called me and told me her story.⁴⁰

I adored my mother, Artise. She was CPA, but had a flamboyant and theatrical side to her. She sang all the time and loved to dance—she taught dance in our California community, and performed in the local theater. She was also boisterous, outspoken, and had a ferocious temper.

When our dad died, she did her best to support and take care of us kids. But when I was thirty-three, she was diagnosed with breast cancer, moved in with me, and /

took care of *her*. Two weeks before she died, she told me, "After I die, I'm going to be back, and I'll see you again."

A few years later, I had a daughter, Kari. Even before she could talk, everyone in the family noticed similarities between Artise and Kari. My husband said, "That's just hereditary." But I wasn't so sure. Neither was Dolores, my grandmother (Artise's mother), who lived with us.

Kari hummed all the time. She would sit in her playpen and hum a melody I couldn't identify, and Dolores would say, "Oh, that's so-and-so," and go to the piano and play the tune, to Kari's utter delight. Kari hummed along and swung her arms to the music. This absolutely floored Dolores because she recognized the tunes baby Kari was humming—they were all tunes Artise had sung.

One day, Dolores and I were driving down the road with Kari, who had just turned two. She was in the back in her car seat, humming away as usual. Suddenly, she burst into song and sang *all* of the verses of *Chattanooga Choo Choo*. I was so flabbergasted, I had to pull over. Dolores was in hysterics, crying, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God! That was one of Artise's favorite songs!" It was an old standard from 1941.

There's no way this two-year-old could have learned that song—with *all* of the verses. She couldn't have heard it on the radio or TV because it's not a song you hear anymore. Even Dolores didn't know all of the verses and I sure didn't. But Kari did.

That was the moment that convinced us Artise was back. I remembered her prediction two weeks before she died and it gave me chills.

Kari could dance, too. When she was four, I took her to her first tap-dance class. As soon as we got there, she flitted across the floor, improvising her own exuberant dance. The dance teacher, astounded as she watched Kari run through complicated steps and rhythms and postures, asked, "How many lessons has this child had already?" I chuckled to myself and thought "Of course she knows how to do this—Artise was a dance teacher."

In many ways, Kari brought my mother's fierce personality with her. She is such a self-directed and determined little girl, she commands respect. I think it's partly for my benefit because her assertiveness is forcing me to learn patience and tolerance. Together we're learning lessons, evolving and growing as souls. I'm so lucky she has taught me that reincarnation really can happen. It's so special.

But it's not always easy. I get frustrated because sometimes I feel I'm trying to reason with Kari and my mother at the same time. I have to remind myself that she's the child this time.

Deep Inside the Family

The more I worked with these same-family cases, the more I realized how special they are. They have a different feeling—more intimate, up-close and personal. Why?

Because the family knows everything about their deceased relative (the previous personality). They can compare what the child says with their own memories of the relative, unlike cases where the child is remembering the life of some unnamed stranger.

They see the child mirroring traits and mannerisms of the relative the family knew so well. These traits could be anything: personality quirks, strange habits, talents and skills, dislikes, cravings—for example, a fondness for ketchup sandwiches. Or the child has an uncanny knowledge of forgotten family lore, inside jokes, forgotten nicknames.

They first speculate, and then are convinced, that they're in the presence of a reincarnated relative because they know for certain what their toddler has, and has not, been exposed to. Stand-out behaviors can't be explained by mimicry if they're ingrained in the child's personality, persistent, and in some cases observable since birth. Heredity can't account for such specific and peculiar behaviors that nobody else in the family shares. If the child has birthmarks, the family knows what injuries, scars, fatal wounds that the relative had when they died.

Sometimes the child surfaces dark family secrets: addictions, abuse, tragedies, regrets. All are part of the story. Sometimes the truth comes together in a single moment:

~Blondie~

My daughter Katie was an early talker. As soon as she could form full sentences, she asked repeatedly, "Remember when I was your mommy?" I didn't take her seriously. I thought she was just being cute.

But one day, when Katie was three, she got serious, held my cheeks in her hands, looked me in the eye and said, "They used to call me Blondie."

I was shocked, but collected myself enough to repeat, "They used to call you Blondie?"

Katie said, "Yes, and you were my little girl." Then she leaned closer and whispered in my ear, "But I didn't like you very much when you were *my* little girl."

I said, "Why didn't you? Mommies *always* love their little girls."

She said, still whispering, "Because you used to yell at me and push me into my room and lock the door."

I was speechless. My mother's nickname was Blondie, but no one in my current family knows that. When I was a teen, after my parents divorced, my mother drank all the time and sometimes when it got really bad she would threaten violence. All I could do was yell at her and, to protect my little sister and me from her wrath, lock her in her room until she sobered up. No one but me and my sister ever knew about this.⁴¹

Most families aren't convinced all at once. They only gradually realize what's going on. Some family members accept it sooner, some resist as long as they can. But after a point, they piece together the evidence and are pressed to accept reincarnation as the *only* explanation for all of these "coincidences." Once they do, all of the child's startling statements and idiosyncrasies make perfect sense.

~Fear of Burning~

This story has many parts. It's a healing story, beginning with night terrors. It's also about an abrupt change in belief that brings peace after many years of torment. The whole family becomes involved. Lizz, the grandmother, told me the story in a series of emails.⁴²

From the time my grandson, Ethan, was born, he would wake in the middle of the night in a panic, thrashing, screaming, and kicking. If we tried to soothe and comfort him, he didn't respond. Also, he was terrified by mechanical noises—the sound of the vacuum cleaner made him screech with fear.

When he was three, out of the blue, Ethan told me he "died outside." A few weeks later he told me he died in an airplane that "burned up like in a fireplace, and then it fell down out of the sky."

I was shocked, to say the least! I told my daughter, Julie, what her son had said. I knew Julie's father-in-law had died in a plane crash in 1981 when her husband, Steve, was eleven years old. He rarely talked about his father's violent death, and never in front of Ethan because it still brought up painful memories. Julie dismissed Ethan's statements as just coincidence.

Steve's dad, Judd, was a Florida businessman who owned yachts and an airplane and regularly made business trips. One night, he and his business partner and his partner's young son were flying back from New York; a pilot was flying the plane. They never made it to Florida. The plane was found crashed and burned in the mountains of North Carolina. There were no survivors.

When Ethan was four, he began talking more with his mother about the plane crash, just a few sentences here and there. Then one day, he began to tell her about the plane crash in such vivid detail, she began to suspect his story might be true.

Ethan said the plane burned as it fell, and they hit a mountain. He said that when the plane caught fire, the people were burning too. And screaming. He said there was a "big boy," who had red hair, sitting in the seat beside him.

At first, his father flatly refused to believe Ethan's story. He said Ethan was wrong. His dad's plane crashed, but it didn't burn, and the partner's son was only three, not a "big boy." Also, nobody said that the boy was sitting next to his father when they crashed. Julie suggested they call Steve's older sister, Sandi, who would know the details, because she was twenty at the time of the accident.

When Steve called Sandi and told her everything Ethan said, she started screaming and crying. She admitted that their father and the other people on the plane were badly burned, that the plane caught fire as it fell. They didn't tell Steve the details at the time to spare him the horror; he was only eleven. She confirmed the little boy had been sitting next to Judd, just as Ethan said. He was a seven-year-old redhead. To Ethan, who was four, a seven-year-old was a "big boy".

Steve was deeply upset when he found out that his father burned and suffered before he died. But there was another reason he was so upset. He realized that Ethan's extraordinary knowledge of what happened that night could only point to a past life. But his church taught that believing in reincarnation is a sin. He grew up under the influence of a very religious mother and never questioned his church's teachings. He truly believed his dad, who never attended church, "was not saved and was going to Hell." During his dad's funeral, eleven-year-old Steve could think of nothing else but his dad burning in Hell. He was tormented by this thought for years.

This was a turning point. Little Ethan's facts were so accurate he couldn't imagine any other explanation. He accepted his son as Judd, his father, returned. This forced him to reconsider his religious beliefs, especially his concept of Hell. Now

that Steve believes Judd and Ethan are the same soul, he sees the similarities as his son grows up. This gives him “great comfort.”

Lizz continues with her account of the healing catharsis:

One more thing. I was babysitting Ethan shortly after his first revelations about the plane crash. He was four.

I was bathing him in the tub. He looked up at me and said, with sad eyes, “Grammie, one time I burned up and fell out of the sky. I was covered with boo-boos and died.”

Then he started crying and sobbing. He sobbed and sobbed. I held him close and told him it all happened a long time ago, and he is now safe. That’s the last we heard about it. And to our relief, the night terrors stopped—he never had them again.

In subsequent emails, Lizz described the family game of spotting similarities between Judd and Ethan.

Judd was flamboyant and vain; Ethan is too, just like his grandfather. That could be hereditary, except that nobody else in the family behaves like that.

But Ethan also has other traits that are harder to explain. Judd was a master pool player; nobody else in our family plays pool, but Ethan is a natural and when he plays for money, he wins every time. Judd loved to fish and eat the fish he caught. Everybody in our family hates fish except Ethan, who’s always begging his mother to buy fish to eat.

Judd liked to use plenty of aftershave. When Ethan was quite small, I caught him literally pouring a container of his dad’s aftershave down the front of his shirt. When I snatched the bottle away, he complained, “But Grammie, I want to smell handsome!” To this day, Ethan loves to “smell handsome,” and regularly uses aftershave, just like his grandpa.

Now, as a young adult, Ethan reports the memories are gone: “Like remembering what I remembered.” He’s still beset by occasional moments of intense fear and panic, and has a fear of flying, but says he can deal with it because he knows it’s from a past life.

Front-row Seat to Reincarnation

In 2001, I published the first book ever to be devoted to the same-family phenomenon: *Return from Heaven*. In the twenty years since, I've come to appreciate even more the importance of same-family cases to reincarnation research.

Same-family cases pull back the curtain on how reincarnation works. Because these families are intimately familiar with both the deceased, on the one hand, and the child on the other, they see the coming and going, the before and after. They notice the finer points, the subtle details of what transcends death and carries over to the next life. They have a front-row seat to reincarnation.

We researchers can aggregate same-family cases and analyze them for subtle patterns that aren't apparent in cases where the previous personality is unknown. Apparently what carries over is not only memories of people, places, events, skills and behaviors, but also relationship patterns and a wide range of emotions.

And because we see both sides, we can discern patterns and propose hypotheses for why the soul chooses to return to the family it left behind. At the very least, we have evidence that the choice is not random or arbitrary, not governed by rules coming from on high or administered by some invisible hand. At best, we gain real insight and appreciate how often the choice is propelled by familiar human drives and needs.

It's as close as we'll ever get to a controlled laboratory experiment in reincarnation.

~Dying Under a Mattress ~

Tracy called me about her son, Peter. But this story is as much about Edith, the grandmother, as it is about Peter, the reincarnated child. Through Peter's explicit memories, Edith finds peace and redemption from that awful night when she lost both her son and husband.⁴³

My family's house burned to the ground when I was two years old. It happened on a very cold night in upstate Michigan, where it gets very cold. My parents, five of my six brothers, and I managed to get out of the house in time. My father ran back into the burning house to rescue three-year-old Dougie, but got trapped. Both he and Dougie died in the fire.

No one in the family ever, ever talked about it. It was taboo to even mention it because my mother, Edith, lost both her husband and son on the same night. She was devastated and never got over it.

Twenty years later, my son Peter was born. He had just turned three when his night terrors began. He would wake up in the middle of the night screaming,

"Mommy, Mommy, Mommy!" I was shocked by his bizarre behavior because he seemed to be awake, sitting up and staring straight ahead with his eyes wide open, but when I asked him what was wrong he pushed me away and yelled, "Go away! I want my Mommy, I want my Mommy!" Nothing I did could calm him down. He just screamed louder and pushed me away as if he didn't know who I was. These episodes went on for several long months, exhausting me emotionally and physically, and taking a toll on the rest of the family.

He also had an hysterical fear of fire. If a cigarette is lit in front of him, he panics and runs away. If he sees a lighter, he goes berserk. He doesn't like wood stoves, either, and he flips out at the sight of my mother's kerosene heater.

Around the same time, during the day when he was awake, Peter began telling me stories about his "friend" Dougie and how he died. He talked about Dougie all the time and especially the night Dougie's family was awakened by the barking of their dog to find the house on fire. He described the house, always calling it the "yellow house," and it had a big pine tree next to it that burned too, and a driveway that went all around the house, not like our house that only has one driveway. He added that Dougie's grandparents, who lived across the road, ran over and stood outside, in the cold with the family, watching helplessly as the house burned. He described the three fire trucks that came fast down the road with their lights flashing and one big fireman with a brown beard.

He talked about the fire often, adding a little more detail each time. He seemed to be able to see the whole scene in his mind and knew exactly what was going on both inside and outside the house.

Every time he added to the story, I called my mother, Edith, to check if he was right, and not just making this up. Each time, she confirmed that every detail Peter gave was correct. The yellow house, double driveway, burning pine tree, the grandparents and big fireman with the beard—all correct.

If that wasn't weird enough, what really chilled me was that three-year old Peter described how he died. He said when his father ran back into the house to save Dougie they were trapped by the flames and couldn't get out, so they hid under a mattress to get away from the smoke. I didn't want to ask my mother about this awful detail, so I asked my oldest brother. He said it was true. The firemen had found both bodies under a mattress.

Peter repeated the story of the fire, always with the same detail, for about a year until he was four. The memories always came up suddenly and randomly, with nothing I could see to trigger them. For example, he would be playing on the floor with his toys and suddenly stop playing, stare at me and, with a very serious expression, tell me again about the dog barking and the brown-bearded fireman and the smoke and hiding under the mattress. When he talked about the fire, his demeanor changed completely. Usually he was a care-free child, so happy and bubbly that everyone called him "Silly." But when he spoke of the fire, he was serious, focusing hard on the images in his mind. If I got up to move or do something else while he was talking about it, he would follow me around to make sure I listened. Clearly, he had something important to tell me.

I started to suspect that Peter might be the reincarnation of Dougie. But I tried to find another explanation because nobody I knew believed in reincarnation. I thought it's *possible* Peter could have been really lucky to imagine all the correct details. But I didn't see any way a three-year-old could imagine hiding and dying under a mattress. That's when I started thinking seriously that Peter was the reincarnation of Dougie.

Edith, too, was finally convinced that Dougie had come back to her as Peter. This brought her such great relief. For the first time in more than twenty years, she was able to talk about the fire. For the first time in twenty years, she was able to speak the name of her dead son.

Once Edith started to open up and talk about the tragedy, she revealed a painful secret—a secret she had harbored all these years since Dougie's death.

My mother never spanked us—ever—no matter what we did. Now that she talks about the fire, she finally explained why. The night Dougie died, right before he went to bed, she spanked him for something he did. Then he died. It was bad enough she never had a chance to say goodbye, but it was so much worse because the last thing she did was punish him. If only she had sent him off to bed with a kiss and "I love you!" She carried this torment and guilt inside her all these years.

But now that she has finally confessed, she goes on and on about it. I feel good to know she got a second chance and doesn't have to carry that guilt around anymore. Now that Dougie is back, she can let go of it.

I believe that's why Dougie came back. He came back to be with my mother again and to help her heal her grief and guilt. The two of them are extremely close now, very easy and loving, like mother and son. Their bond is so strong that sometimes she slips up and calls him "Son," and in return he calls her "Mom." Whenever Peter is really troubled about something now, he won't talk to me about it. He'll go to Gramma first. As his mother, I would feel very left out if I didn't understand that he is her son reborn and he needs to have this special relationship with her.

Tracy told me she has come to terms with the fact that her dead brother and her son are somehow the same, and this gives her great comfort. Now, she yearns to learn more about the world of spirit. It's expanded her inner life. But it hasn't made her outer life easier.

I believe that Peter is the reincarnation of Dougie. But I needed to understand better what that really means, so I went to priests and ministers for advice. But they all turned me away. They said I was nuts and had a problem. My mom believes what I believe. But my husband doesn't. The rest of the family tells me to "get off it." They refuse to believe what's right in front of them.

There's a new pattern in this case, a pattern seen in a small percentage of cases: *after-death omniscience*. Peter was aware of all that was happening immediately after he died from the perspective *outside* the house—the fireman with the brown beard, burning tree, etc. This all-seeing perspective, presumably after the soul has left the body, is consistent with the many reports of near-death experiences (NDEs).

Relationships

In same-family cases we observe the *reactions* of the family as closely as we do the *actions* and outbursts of the child. It's not only about trying to understand who the child was and why the memories are emerging. Other family members have roles, too, and are just as deeply affected. The drama ropes in the whole family.

Indeed, relationships are a hallmark of these cases. We can trace relationship issues dating back to a former life and watch as the same issues resurrect in a renewed relationship in a new life. Some of the issues are as simple as the desire to resume love. Some are as complex, layered, and deeply felt as any close relationship resumed after a long absence. It could be about repairing feelings cut off by a sudden death—no chance to forgive or be forgiven. Rebirth in the same family is an opportunity for redemption and deep healing for *both sides* of an interrupted relationship.

This is why these same-family stories are so emotionally charged. The families find themselves face to face with the reincarnation of a person they were close to, grew up with, lived with day by day, fought and loved, betrayed and nourished. They see the full picture. They recognize the unfinished business calling out in the child's statements and behaviors. They *feel* the emotions carried over from the past.

And they're in a position to act. They can reinvigorate a loving relationship, make amends, repair a wrong, learn lessons. For some, with this new knowledge, they see what needs to be healed within *themselves*.

~A Second Chance~

Beverly found my website, called me and, because we lived in the same city, we met for lunch. She told me her story.⁴⁴

I was only seventeen when I had Brent, and I wasn't prepared for the responsibilities of parenthood. He was a colicky baby and screamed and cried all the time. I would lose my temper and scream back at him. I badly mistreated my baby, and so did my abusive alcoholic husband. After I had Scott, I took both boys and left my husband. I never saw him again.

As Brent grew up, I realized only gradually how much I had damaged him. During the last few months of his life, almost every day, I cried and said to him, "I'm sorry for all the mean things I've done to you. I always wanted to be a good mom, but I didn't know how. I hope I can make it up to you, because I do love you. I want to make things right."

The last time I said that to him was the day he died. His speeding car hit a tree. The autopsy said he died from the impact of his forehead hitting the steering wheel. He was nineteen.

Two years later, I married again and soon gave birth to Jesse.

Jesse was born with a large strawberry birthmark covering most of his forehead. He had constant head pain as a baby and couldn't stand having his head down. I took him to specialists but the doctors could only guess the pain was caused by ear infections.

Jesse was an early talker, and he started making remarks from Brent's life I couldn't explain. I began to wonder if there was a connection between Jesse's head pain, his birthmark, and how Brent died from hitting the steering wheel with his forehead.

One day, right after his first birthday, he pointed to a picture of Brent in our bedroom and yelled, "Me, Me!" I explained it was a picture of his brother. But he insisted, "Me! Me!" He was so forceful about it.

That incident and others like it, plus the birthmark and head pain, were all too much. Could this be reincarnation? But that's just a concept. How could it happen in my life? All I knew for sure was I couldn't explain these strange similarities between Brent and Jesse. I was really careful not to jump to any conclusions, because I knew how easy it would be for me to imagine this. Of course I wanted my son back, but I didn't think that was even possible.

But then this happened:

Jesse had just turned four and I was folding the laundry, listening to a man on the radio talk about a four-year-old who set his house on fire. I sat Jesse on the dryer and explained to him what that little boy had done and why he should never play with fire.

Jesse nodded and said, "Yeah, Mommy. Like that time when our bathroom was on fire and I saved my brother."

I stopped folding, turned to him and gasped, "What did you say?"

He said, "When I lived in my *other* house."

I was stunned, but tried to keep my cool. I said, "Where did you live?"

He said, "Down near Grandma's."

For a while, when Brent and Scott were little, we lived in an apartment within walking distance of my mother's. The electricity went off one day when the two boys were in the tub. I told them not to move while I ran to get some candles. I lit the candles and told them to stay in the tub while I got their pajamas. Well, as soon as I walked out of the bathroom, Scott stepped out of the tub and knocked a candle into the trash can. The room went up in a blaze. Brent grabbed his little brother and pushed him out of the bathroom. This all happened in a few seconds. Brent really did save his brother.

I acknowledged what Jesse was saying, "That was a very scary time for us, wasn't it?" He agreed, but then stopped talking about it. That was it. The memory just came and went.

I will never forget that wonderful moment. Now I knew Brent was back. And once I realized this, other things Jesse had said and some of his behaviors that I

thought were just coincidence suddenly all fit together into a complete picture.⁴⁵

Brent was back in my life. Slowly, as the full meaning of this sunk in, it softened my pain and lifted the guilt I'd been carrying around for so long.

It's strange, but I hardly go to the cemetery anymore to visit Brent's grave—only on special occasions. I used to go every week but now I don't feel the need to go.

I asked Beverly what it means to her to have her son back.

For twenty years, I believed I had treated Brent badly because I didn't love him enough. Now I realize I was just too young to have a baby, and he suffered because of it.

We still have a lot of mending and healing to do. Everything is not automatically right just because he's back as Jesse. The feelings of grief and guilt don't just disappear.

Occasionally, some of our old behavior patterns return and we both recognize them and agree that we both need to change and learn. But it's different this time. Jesse is a much happier spirit, with enough awareness to correct me when I need it. And I'm a different mother compared to before. I'm more willing to look at my mistakes and change. I thank God every day for my second chance to show Jesse I can be a good mom.

Are Same-family Cases Rare?

If same-family cases are so common, why aren't they better known?

Stevenson clearly considered them unsatisfactory for his purposes, tainted by the fact that the family knew the deceased (the same fact that I think makes them so valuable). He reluctantly includes a few, but only if they have birthmarks or a constellation of behaviors to reinforce the statements. Other researchers follow his example and continue to sideline same-family cases.

American families are reluctant to report or share their cases. For them, reincarnation is a foreign concept, and the notion that a relative could be reborn to their family is the furthest thing from their minds. They keep their stories to themselves because they're afraid of what people will say.

There's another reason American same-family cases are, until recently, not better known. Before the Internet, there was no place where these families could go to share their stories

without risking ridicule. But now, when the questions build and they need a reality check, they do a Google search and find the Forum and my books and the assurances they need.

Self-evident

The evidence in same-family cases is not the same as that of the Stevenson-style cases. It's a different type of evidence based primarily on what the family knows, not on what an outside observer might document and verify.

But the fact that reincarnation is a fringe idea in America is exactly why American same-family cases offer some of the best, most credible evidence for reincarnation.

The families that do come forward do so despite cultural and religious obstacles. The evidence that is so direct and immediate for them has already survived their own self-inquisition of doubt. They've already searched desperately for any possible explanation, and questioned their own motives more than any outside researcher could do. They've already navigated a tortuous sequence of emotions, from shock, to denial ("it's impossible!"), to praying it would go away, to bewilderment, self-doubt, self-blame ("it's just my wishful thinking"), to guilt and worry because they dread something is wrong with their child.

When they do come forward, it's at the risk of being ridiculed, ostracized from their church, branded a sinner, foolish, or insane. And, finally, they have *nothing* to gain by going public.

The crowning reason these American same-family make such good evidence is their manifest power to neutralize life-long disbelief in reincarnation. We watch as family members, when they no longer can deny what they see with their own eyes, go through radical changes in their religious beliefs and worldviews. It's a pattern in many of the cases. The evidence rattles their convictions and reverses their resolute belief that "you only live once." So many of these accounts end with the sentiment: "I never thought reincarnation was real, but now I do."

This is why the families with reincarnation in their midst are such credible witnesses, and why same-family cases are valid evidence. Not only is the evidence valid, but it comes packaged in these colorful, vivid, heart-felt stories that any American can relate to.

V. Beyond Disbelief

Changing belief is hard. How do we persuade a person to shift their worldview on something as mysterious and deeply personal as what happens after death?

I'm convinced reincarnation is real. The families I work with are convinced, too, because they experience it directly. But what about the people who aren't lucky enough to see it first-hand? What will it take to persuade them? What will it take to convince lots of people, a critical mass, to give reincarnation more respectability in our Western culture? How do we stop the eye-rolls, snickers, mockery, ridicule commonly hurled at people who dare to believe we live *more* than once.

— Disbelief —

The people who do the mocking are in the majority. They include staunchly religious people, who are brought up to believe that reincarnation is sin because when you die you go to Heaven or Hell, for eternity. Dyed-in-the-wool materialists believe that consciousness is merely a product of brain chemistry and when you die, brain and body are reduced to dust, consciousness ceases, and anyone who believes the mind can exist outside the body—especially a dead body—is not being realistic. No matter how strong the evidence, these people aren't going to change their minds.

Still, there is a sizable segment of people who might be persuaded. Thirty-three percent of Americans admit to pollsters they believe in reincarnation.⁴⁶ I suspect that many of these respondents are being philosophically open-minded and don't otherwise see reincarnation as having any relevance to their lives. Yet, their open-mindedness is our opening. At least they'll listen to evidence.

But what evidence?

Science *alone* won't persuade them. If anyone were to penetrate the mainstream with a purely scientific argument, Dr. Stevenson would have by now. Most people, though they respect science, don't think like scientists and won't be swayed by logic and data when it comes to questions of death and the afterlife. Most people, the people we need to reach, have not and never will read Stevenson.

And there's a danger in shaping the evidence to satisfy scientists alone. To do so means speaking the language of science, reporting the experiences of children and families using data, metrics, probabilities, logical propositions, and exhaustive analysis, all spoken in the parlance of academic journals, hedging every finding and qualifying each assertion as "most likely, but maybe not." The language of science is foreign to most people. It also means putting a premium on objective evidence and filtering out the aspects that can't be objectified—the subjective, personal, emotional aspects that are essential to complete the picture and express the human side of the phenomenon, the side that makes these cases relatable.

And we can't wait for the mainstream scientific community to suddenly embrace Stevenson's work and make it safe for rationalists to believe in reincarnation. Stevenson stayed within the bounds of science his whole life. He persisted, hoping that the force of his evidence would convince his peers to admit the limitations of their materialist paradigm and adopt, instead, the premise that mind—consciousness—functions outside the body. It didn't work.⁴⁷ If it hasn't happened in 60 years, it's not going to happen. At least not in my lifetime.

— Persuasion —

The best evidence for the *continuation of consciousness* comes from children's past life memories. These children are the reincarnation of individuals who died, but whose consciousness somehow survived to live again as a reborn child. The proof is in the child's memories and physical marks that defy any other explanation.

The best evidence for *children's past life memories* is not only scientific evidence, but all types of evidence taken together, combined and compounded, to reflect the full depth and coherence of the phenomenon.

A crucial component—the core of the compounded evidence—is the lifework of Dr. Ian Stevenson. He built the foundation on which all other evidence is laid, starting with framing the question: *What survives bodily death?* He's done the heavy lifting. With his monumental effort and 2600 verified cases, he's amassed all the hard evidence we need. There's no need to duplicate his results. Which means, there's no need to inspect every new case as stand-alone proof.

Instead we can loosen up and welcome all types of evidence—not only evidence to prove the phenomenon, but evidence for *how the phenomenon works*. The more lucid, functional, and complete our understanding, the better our chances of convincing non-believers that it's real and has a bearing on their lives.

Different Types of Evidence

There are four types of evidence that differ from, yet supplement and complete, the hardcore evidence that Dr. Stevenson (and researchers following his model) compiled. The cases in this essay are examples of how *all* types of evidence combine to make the most persuasive argument for reincarnation.

1) Many Small Cases

Over the last 30 years, I've found hundreds of new cases. Some are complete and self-contained. Most are small, modest by Stevenson standards.

Small cases, too small to stand-alone as proof, add significantly to the body of evidence when bundled and studied for recurring themes and patterns. The patterns are consistent, observable, empirical. They can be listed, grouped, quantified, and studied. Subjective features—for example, the goosebumps effect—qualify as objective evidence if repeated in enough cases to be seen as a pattern.

The size of the data set adds to our confidence, too, by marginalizing errors. Even if a few questionable cases slip into the set, if some are mis-reported or somehow bogus, they're canceled out by recurring patterns in the bulk of the cases. *There's no way the patterns in a large body of cases can be faked.* No way a conspiracy of parents from around the world could cooperate to “put one over on” researchers.

Furthermore, if we welcome small cases as evidence, we'll discover there is no lack of American (and Western) cases. The average Westerner can't relate to a case in India. But American stories featuring kids in carseats, taking dance lessons, play-acting with toy fire hatchets, are something they can relate to.

2) Practicality as Evidence

Twenty-five years ago I turned the patterns I saw into guidelines and published them in my books. Ever since, I've heard from people all over the world who describe how they applied my guidelines and how well they worked. Moderators and regulars on the Reincarnation Forum refer to my guidelines often as they dispense advice.

This is comparable to how social scientists and education innovators validate their theories: translate hypotheses into guidelines and methods, release them into the wild to be applied by practitioners, then monitor the results. If the results are consistent with the hypothesis, the hypothesis is deemed valid.

Healing is a practical outcome of many of these cases. It works by acknowledging the truth of the past life story. Healing contributes to the evidence because the results are observable, the changes stark and immediate.

3) Witness Testimony

In many of the American cases, and especially the same-family cases, much of the evidence hinges on believing what the families report, with no means of outside verification.

This makes many researchers nervous. It's too subjective, they say, and hard to defend against critics who claim that parent testimony can't be trusted. This may be true for witnesses in distant non-Western cultures that expect reincarnation, where interviews are conducted through interpreters, and where the researchers arrive on the scene months or years after the child's memories first emerge.

But in many of my American cases, I'm in direct communication with the mothers as the case unfolds. So are moderators on the Reincarnation Forum. With such a close relationship, if there is any self-deception or wholesale fakery, we spot it easily.

The parents are witnesses in the fullest sense of the term—eye-witnesses, first on the scene. They report what they see. It's a process, sometimes spanning a few years, and they chronicle the changes and shifts, including their own earnest efforts to disprove it for themselves. They bear witness to how it makes them feel and how their deep-seated beliefs are turned upside down. They didn't believe in reincarnation before, now they do.

4) Emotion as Evidence

In most of these cases, emotion is central to the story. If, for example, the child is deeply troubled with nightmares, it is emotion from a traumatic past life death that is pushing through. And the child's outbursts send the parents on their own emotional roller-coaster ride.

Critics complain that emotion isn't evidence because it's too subjective. Objectivity means observing from a distance to prevent the researcher's feelings and expectations from contaminating the data. But in these past life cases, objectivity is counter-productive if it means keeping the people at arm's length. These families aren't lab experiments, mere data points. They're going through profound, highly emotional, mystical experiences that touch on questions of death and spirit. The stories, and therefore the evidence, are not complete without the emotion.⁴⁸

My relationship with the families is more as a counselor than as a researcher. If the evidence is compromised because I'm not coldly objective, it's more than compensated by the way the families open up and share everything they're thinking and feeling—the emotional component that completes the story and brings the cases to life.

Whole stories, Human Stories

How do we persuade enough people to see reincarnation as a practical reality, or at least to be respected in our Western culture as a viable world view? It's not a question of having enough evidence. We have an abundance of evidence.

The answer is in how the evidence is *presented and communicated*. We will persuade the most people by shaping the combined evidence into stories, narratives that convey the full scope and vitality of children's past life memories. A well-told narrative has more persuasive power, more potential to change more minds, than even the most masterful academic argument. People internalize stories. They identify and empathize with the actors, relate to their predicaments, follow the action, absorb the lessons. Stories are remembered and shared.

And, boy, do we have good stories! Profoundly human stories about children and families coping with unseen mysteries, set against the backdrop of American families going about their mundane lives when, out of the blue, a child with past life memories turns their world upside down.

Crafting dramatic narratives does not diminish the truth of the hard facts. Evidential facts—statements, behaviors, birthmarks—drive the action and anchor the story in reality. The empirical evidence is even more convincing, more persuasive if wrapped in a story.

The best evidence is whole stories, human stories. Tell the stories well.

VI. See Death Differently

In 1997, Kathy found my book in a bookstore and had a friend email me (Kathy didn't own a computer). When I first read her story, I was deeply moved and eager to talk to her.⁴⁹

Kathy was a teenager when her first son, James, was born in March, 1978. She was estranged from James's father, who had disappeared. When James was sixteen months old, he was diagnosed with neuroblastoma and rapidly became very ill. As the disease progressed he developed 17 tumors in his left leg, a tumor behind his right ear, and a large tumor behind his left eye which caused opaqueness and blindness in that eye. When he was in the hospital, doctors inserted an IV on the right side of his neck which left a linear surgical scar. In another hospital procedure, they biopsied the tumor behind his right ear.

After doing what they could in the hospital, the doctors told Kathy to take him home. Kathy was devastated. She lovingly cared for her dying son.

One day, James saw Kathy crying. He said, "Momma, don't cry for me." Just after his second birthday, James died. Kathy honored her dying son's wish and kept her grief bottled up inside.

After James died, Kathy met and married Don, and they had a daughter. That marriage ended after four years. She then married Billy and, finally, she was in a good marriage. They had a son, Josh.

Because I Left You There

Twelve years after James's death, Kathy gave birth by C-section to another son, Chad. As she woke from the anesthesia, several doctors filed into her room telling her they had troubling news.

They informed me that my son appeared to be blind in his left eye—there was no color in it. When they brought my baby to me and put him in my arms, I noticed what looked like a linear surgical scar on the right side of his neck, in the same spot where James had an IV inserted while undergoing treatment. The pediatrician assured me it was just a birthmark. I also noticed what appeared to be

a tumor behind his right ear, the same spot where doctors had performed a biopsy on James. The pediatrician assured me it was just a functional cyst that should disappear soon. I realized in an instant that the blind left eye, the birthmark on the right side of his neck, and the cyst behind his right ear looked exactly like the abnormalities on James's body right before he died.

I asked the doctors, "How can this be?" They didn't know.

Holding Chad for the first time, I knew this was James. He had come back to me. I felt the bond immediately and the feeling went straight to my heart. I hadn't felt this way with my two other children born after James died. I felt an ocean of relief and comfort wash over me. A great weight lifted from my soul.

This was coming from a woman raised in a strict Baptist home in America's Bible Belt, who never read any books about reincarnation or Eastern philosophy. Where she came from, believing in reincarnation was heresy.

I cautiously shared what I was feeling with my husband. He didn't know what to think. When I shared this with my ex-husband, Don, he told me I had "lost my mind." I knew I couldn't discuss it with my family, they would think I was mad. I decided to keep this to myself.

When Chad was four, quite out of the blue, Chad asked me if I remembered our *other* house.

"What other house?" I asked.

He described the house: orange and brown outside with "chocolate" furniture. He then asked for his toys, describing a red "weeble-wobble" toy that jingled when it rolled.

"Why do you want to go back to this other house? For toys?" I asked.

He looked straight into my eyes and said, "*Because I left you there.*"

These words *made the hair on the back of my neck stand up*. Chad was describing the apartment where we lived when James was a baby—orange and brown stucco, and we had brown furniture. Weeble-wobble was James' favorite toy, but Chad never saw it. We don't have any photos of the apartment building.

This was the first time Chad identified with James. He repeated over the next few months that he wanted me to take him to his "other" home.

It was at this point that Kathy contacted me. We talked on the phone frequently over the next few years. Kathy kept me updated on every new development.

Every now and then, usually in bursts, Chad surprised me with more details from James' life. I didn't question or prompt him. I waited for him to bring it up because I didn't want to influence him in any way.

Besides, I had no idea what to say to him.

One night I brought out a picture of James, one I had never shared with anybody, because I wanted to see how Chad would react when he saw it for the first time. When he saw it, the expression on his face was hard to explain. He had a shocked grin, his mouth dropped, his eyes got big, and he gasped for air.

I asked him, "What's wrong?"

He said, "I've been wishing for this picture. I want it because it's me."

Another time, Chad went up to his older brother and said, "When I was two years old I got so sick I couldn't keep 7Up down. Then I died and came back. When I die again, I'll come back again." At that moment his father walked into the room and the spell was broken. Chad didn't say any more. It was true about the 7 Up, and no one else knew about it.

When Chad was four, he asked me if he would need surgery again. I answered, "No, you've *never* had surgery."

"Yes, I did, remember? It was over my ear," he said, pointing to the exact spot over his right ear where the surgeons had biopsied a tumor on James.

Reading a Book Slowly

Kathy and I talked about why James came back to be with her again. Was there a clue in his very first remark—he wanted to go back to his former house, "because I left you there"? If she could figure out what Chad needed to hear, she'd know what to say to him.

It took me months to muster the courage to talk directly to Chad about his memories. It was still too painful for me to talk about it. I was afraid it would bring up more grief.

Finally, one evening, I found the courage and sat him down on my lap and said, "I don't know everything, but I know you were here before and you were a very sick little boy. Then you had to go away so you could come back in a healthy body."

Chad looked at me and listened, a serious look on his face. Then his eyebrows lifted, his face lit up, and he chirped, "I know." That's all there was to it. He ran off to play.

Chad seemed to understand what I was telling him and appeared relieved. I was relieved too, after finally getting up the courage to have the conversation I had dreaded for so long.

I pray for healing for *both* of our souls. I want Chad's soul to be at peace. If he felt guilty about leaving me or needed to know how sad I was when he died, now he knows I'm okay and he's loved.

I'm learning that healing the soul is like reading a book slowly: You finish one chapter at a time.

Throughout the following year, Kathy called me from time to time, sometimes just to talk. Five-year-old Chad continued to speak of his life as James, spontaneously and randomly, but gradually less and less. She no longer dreaded hearing his memories. She welcomed those moments and saw them now as a blessing. She was sad they were fading.

On one call, Kathy shared this:

I look back and remember that when James was sick, I prayed for him to get better and be back in my home as a healthy child with a healthy body. I prayed every night for a second chance. But if, when James was dying, somebody had told me that I'd have him back, reborn as another child, I'd say they were on drugs and had completely lost their mind!

If they told me that my prayers would be answered, I would think I was asking for too much, asking for the impossible.

But now that I fully accept James as being a part of Chad, I no longer carry that heavy load of guilt about James's death. I feel lighter. I'm finally at peace. This is a new feeling!

[With Stevenson in Chicago](#)

In 2000, I accompanied Dr. Stevenson and Dr. Jim Tucker, his research colleague, to Chicago to visit Kathy and her family.⁵⁰ With her permission, I had introduced Dr. Stevenson to Kathy in 1998 because I knew that he would appreciate the opportunity to investigate a rare multiple-birthmarks case in an American child.

When we arrived at Kathy's home, I was excited to finally meet her in person. After so many intense conversations over the years, I was fully aware of the profound emotional journey she had been through.

Meanwhile, the doctors were all business, happy to be inspecting some of the best physical evidence ever found in an American case. They examined Chad's body, observed the unusual gait in his left leg (James had had 17 tumors in that leg), measured and photographed the birthmark on his neck and the lesion above his right ear, looked at his ophthalmologist's reports and compared them to James's medical records. They concluded there was a clear correspondence between the abnormalities on James's body at the time of his death and Chad's birthmarks, confirming what Kathy already knew the day he was born.

As we were getting ready to leave, Kathy pulled me aside into her kitchen. She carefully spread out on the table two photographs of James. In the first I saw an adorable, curly-haired toddler on a playground. In the other I saw a bald, sickly, hollow-faced child. I looked over at Chad, and was struck again by the mystery Kathy lived with every day, the depth of which neither of us could communicate in words.

--- Last Words ---

Reincarnation is not just true, it's real. It's a vital, mystical dimension of human life, and it changes how we look at death—as a transition, not an end. Anybody who opens to reincarnation, not just as a theory or philosophy, but as something that actually happens and will happen to them, is opening to see their own inevitable death, and the deaths of people they love, differently.

~Helena's Mother~

When Helena started to speak as a two-year-old about hitting her head and dying and missing her brother Jeffrey, I was puzzled. I always associated reincarnation with Eastern religions and philosophies. I never thought it had any practical application or would ever be relevant to our lives. Boy, was I wrong! Now I see, the returning of the soul has more application to our factual lives than we can fathom. Helena has clearly shown us this truth, and it has changed our lives forever. Death is not the scary black hole it once was. Knowing that the journey through life does not abruptly end when we close our eyes is both fascinating and awesome.

~Jesse's Mother ~

I don't really know what the word "reincarnation" means, but I can say that I believe, without a shadow of a doubt, that the spirit lives on. And that the spirit goes through life to experience as many things as it can to learn how to love. We are here to learn to love so we can move on to a higher plane and be closer to God. That's the whole reason we're here, and why we come back after we die.

I've learned, though, that I have to be very careful who I share this with. My religious girlfriends think I'm crazy. They've told me there is no such thing as reincarnation, it's the devil's work and an abomination against God. That's so naive. It's so sad they're missing such a miracle of God's love and mercy. How can anyone be so close-minded to this beautiful power?

~Chad's Mother ~

How do you accept that your own child who died is back in a new body? Sometimes I get a very high feeling— like I'm walking on air. Other times it's hard to believe, and I probably wouldn't be human if I didn't have some doubt in my mind somewhere. It's so overwhelming because it's forcing me to look at life and death differently. Nothing less.

Trish's Dad

Trish MacGregor is a dear friend of our family. She shared with me this story of her father's last days.

My father, Tony, stopped going to church when I was a kid. He was a complete skeptic. He didn't believe that any part of him would survive death.

After my mother died in 2000, his Parkinson's worsened and he became despondent. He deteriorated to the point that we had to move him to an assisted living facility. I visited him frequently, and desperately wished I could help him find peace before he died.

On one of my visits, I told him he needed to watch a particular episode of ABC *Primetime* because you were in it presenting your most astonishing case, the Leininger case. He remembered you from the last time you visited. He and I watched the episode together on my computer. At the end, I asked, "Dad, what do you think?"

He couldn't speak. He was crying, tears rolling down his cheeks. I started crying, too, because I knew we had made a breakthrough.

He turned to me, wiping his eyes and said, "Trish, that's the most convincing evidence I've ever seen about the soul surviving death."

I'm convinced, in that moment, he released his desperate hold on life because now, for the first time, he believed there was something more after we die. The Leininger story was the turning point for him. He was finally at peace with death.

A couple months later, on the day he died and shortly before he lapsed into a coma, he said, "When I look into a mirror, I no longer see my old self. *I see the young man I'm going to be.*" He squeezed my hand and shut his eyes.

Those were his last words.

Endnotes

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1. For the best and most accessible summaries of Stevenson's work, I recommend his books: *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, and *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*. Also, my two books each include a whole chapter on his work, including summaries of a number of cases.
 2. From the lecture, "Some of My Journeys Through Medicine" Dr. Ian Stevenson, 1989, Southeastern Louisiana University, Lafayette, LA. In this lecture, a rare occasion where Stevenson shared his thinking, is a fascinating and full account of the choices he made that led him to studying children's past life memories. It's available on the University of Virginia website.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Early in his career, Dr. Stevenson wrote a clinical textbook for psychiatrists, *The Diagnostic Interview*, based on methods lawyers use to reconstruct past events that will hold up in a court of law.
 5. Dr. Stevenson created these terms and uses them throughout his writings and lectures.
 6. Ian Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001), p. 101-128. Stevenson describes these and more of the common patterns in the cases of children's past lives.
 7. **Cryptomnesia** is when a forgotten memory returns without its being recognized as such by the subject, who believes it is something new and original.
 8. Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation*, p. 182. Since the statistics in these cases can vary from one of Stevenson's publications to another, I am using only two sources to simplify the process. Any un-cited Stevenson statistic is from CWRPL, cited above, or from *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*—see below.
 9. Ibid., p. 101
 10. Ian Stevenson, *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), p. 86.
 11. "He actually confessed near the end of his life that he would 'die a failure because he had not achieved his primary goal of getting mainstream science ... to seriously consider reincarnation as a possibility.'"
- Jim B. Tucker, *Return to Life*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013), p. 15
12. I saw him do this with one of my cases that we visited together.
 13. Interview in *Omni Magazine* with Ian Stevenson, by Meryle Secrest, 1988. Full interview text available on my website, carolbowman.com.
 14. Carol Bowman, *Children's Past Lives*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), Chapter 1: Chase and Sarah. The whole first part of the book describes in depth how and why I began this research.

15. *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, pp. 166-67. Stevenson stated that 72% of the children remember the previous personality's manner of dying; 52% remember natural deaths; among *solved* cases, 51% remember violent deaths; and among the *unsolved* cases, nearly 91% remember violent deaths. That means that in the unsolved American cases (not including same-family cases), a majority of the children remember dying violently.

16. All of the cases that follow are my original cases (with the exception of the Stevenson case, Celal Kapan), even if they were published subsequently by other people. Most of the cases in this essay are highly condensed, with many details left out. The full versions, if published previously, are cited. The source for all my cases is direct contact with the parents, through emails and/or phone calls, or the Reincarnation Forum. I have documentation in my files for everything said in the cases.

17. Carol Bowman, *Children's Past Lives*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1997) pp. 193-195 (Chapter 10: The Four Signs). *Note: when citing from my two books, page numbers refer to the original hardback versions. I'm providing chapter names to assist finding them in other versions and e-readers.*

18. This case is actually from Australia. The mother and I corresponded through emails.

19. Carol Bowman, *Return From Heaven*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), pp. 100-108. (Chapter 5: Mother Switching)

20. Bowman, *Children's Past Lives*, pp. 248-249 (Chapter 12)

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-144 (Chapter 8)

22. I corresponded with Cathy Byrd through emails and phone calls. The quotes are from both our correspondences and her book, *The Boy Who Knew Too Much*

23. Cathy Byrd, *The Boy Who Knew Too Much*, (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc., 2017).

24. Bowman, *Children's Past Lives.*, pp. 193-195, Chapter 10: *The Four Signs*

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 221-249, Chapter 12: *What a Parent Can Do*

26. *ReincarnationForum.com*. The Forum is free and open to the public.

27. This full thread is available to read on the Reincarnation Forum. Search for user BabyRN. Some additional information here is from private emails. "Melissa" and "Matt" are not their real names.

28. "DOPS" is the Department of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia.

29. "Hundreds of times" as of 1997, the date of this anecdote. Thousands of times as of 2021.

30. Dr. Roger Woolger, one of my mentors and the author of *Other Lives, Other Selves* (Bantam Books, 1988) used "unfinished business of the soul" as a central concept in his writings and teaching. I highly recommend his book.

31. Bowman, *Children's Past Lives*, pp. 140-151, Chapter 8: Blake.

32. Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, p. 107.

33. This case of Laura and Helena is unpublished. Sourced from emails. This version is highly condensed, with many details left out.

34. I worked with the Leiningers since the beginning and most of the material here is from my original notes and emails. Some information is cross-referenced with Bruce and Andrea Leininger's book, *Soul Survivor*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, Hacetate Book Group, 2009).

35. *Ibid.*, p 209. (*Soul Survivor*)

36. *Ibid.*, p. 247, and private email.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 244

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38. Bowman, *Return From Heaven*, pp. 36-37. Chapter 2: A Child Reborn
 39. Pp 36-37 RFH
 40. Bowman, *Return From Heaven*, pp. 91-99, Chapter 5: Mother Switching
 41. Ibid. pp. 117-122, Chapter 5: Mother Switching
 42. *Fear of Burning* is an unpublished case, sourced from private emails and phone conversations with the grandmother.
 43. Ibid. pp. 13-20. (Chapter 1: Family Return)
 44. Ibid. pp. 217-227. (Chapter 9: A Second Chance).
 45. The “other things” that Beverly refers to are in the full write up, referenced previously.
 46. Pew Research Center Survey, October, 2018. Full summary on the Pew site, pewresearch.org.
 47. Stevenson confessed near the end of his life that he would “die a failure because he had not achieved his primary goal of getting mainstream science ... to seriously consider reincarnation as a possibility.” James Tucker, *Return to Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2013),, p. 15.
 48. In a 2004 lecture, “*Children Who Claim to Remember Previous Lives*,” The Third Kern Lecture to the Theosophical Society of America, (available on YouTube), Dr. Stevenson commented on his extensive note taking while interviewing witnesses for the cases: “One of my assistants rebuked me for always keeping my head down, always making notes, saying that I missed seeing the emotions. And, I think it was true to some extent.”
 49. These are only highlights from a long and involved case, fully told in *Return From Heaven* (2001), pp. 21-46 (Chapter 2: A Child Reborn) and pp. 73-88. (Chapter 4: Chicago, USA).
- Dr. Jim Tucker subsequently published his summary of the same case, using different names for the family members, in both of his books: *Life Before Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2005), pp. 52-55, and *Return to Life* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2013), pp.1-17.
50. Dr. Jim Tucker succeeded Dr. Stevenson as the Director of DOPS and continues his research.