

The Reincarnation of a WWII Fighter Pilot...or is it?

"I was prepared to admit that my son, James, was living a past life. Whatever the hell that meant." -- Bruce Leininger

The story of young James Leininger, as set forth in the 2009 book *Soul Survivor: The Reincarnation of a World War II Fighter Pilot*, offers a very convincing case for the survival of consciousness at death. Whether it is strong evidence for reincarnation is another issue.

The story begins with James, only two years old, having nightmares in which he kicks and claws at the covers and yells "Airplane crash! Plane on Fire! Little man can't get out." During the day, James became fascinated with toy airplanes and often crashed them into the coffee table.

According to Bruce and Andrea Leininger, the parents, James was just learning to speak in complex sentences, but when screaming and thrashing around during the frequent nightmares, his words were much more "rich in detail, so plausibly offered, so unchildlike in their desperation." When his parents questioned him about the identity of the "little man," he replied that it was "me." When asked for a name, he replied "James," but was unable to give a surname. He told them that his plane was shot down by the Japanese and crashed. Since James was *his* name, the parents assumed he was confused. However, as the nightmares kept on several times a week, the parents continued the questioning.

James continued to stymie his parents with detailed information, including the name of the aircraft carrier he was assigned to (Natoma Bay), the type of plane he flew (Corsair), the first names of three fellow pilots (Billy, Leon, and Walter) who, he said, welcomed him to "heaven" after he was shot down, and the full name of Jack Larsen, another fellow pilot. He also identified the Japanese fighter planes by the red sun on the fuselage and told his parents that Japanese planes were called either Zekes (fighter planes) or Bettys (bombers). When settling into his car seat, James often mimicked the motions of settling into a cockpit and pulling down his headset.

At age 3, James would draw pictures of planes with flak all around them and would sign the drawings "James 3."

While relatives suggested that perhaps James was seeing into a past life, Bruce Leininger, a vice-president for an oil company, resisted the explanation as it threatened his Christian beliefs. Andrea, though a life-long Christian, was more open-minded and accepted the reincarnation hypothesis. Beginning with the history of the Natoma Bay, Bruce began a 2-3 year investigation that involved attending reunions of the old sailors who served on the carrier as well as digging into records of the pilots who were killed while serving on the Natoma Bay. He narrowed his search down to James Huston, Jr., who was shot down near the island of Chichi-Jima on March 3, 1945, and also discovered that Leon Conner, Walter Devlin, and Billie Peeler were pilots on the Natoma Bay and were all killed a few months before

James Huston. He further found that Jack Larsen was still alive and part of Huston's flight squadron.

James also referred to "slot pilot" and "drop tank" and said that a five-inch cannon was located on the fantail of the Natoma Bay, verified as fact.

After Bruce tracked down James Huston's sister, Anne Barron, James, then age 5, spoke to her on the phone and called her "Annie." Annie later informed the Leiningers that only her dead brother had called her by that name. James also said that he had another sister, Ruth, which he pronounced "Roof," which was confirmed by Anne Barron as fact. In talking with his "sister," James also brought up their father's alcoholism and discussed other "family secrets." The fact that James Huston was a "Jr." was seen as an explanation for the "James 3" signature on the drawings.

One day, while they were outside their home, James told Bruce that he picked him because he knew he would be a "good daddy." When Bruce requested clarification, James said that he found his mother and father in Hawaii at the "big pink hotel." In fact, Bruce and Andrea had celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary in 1997 at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, which was painted pink. That was five weeks before Andrea got pregnant with James.

Around the same time, while watching a History Channel program about Corsairs, James corrected the narrator by pointing out that the Japanese plane seen being shot down was a Tony, not a Zero. When the parents asked for an explanation, James explained that the Tony was a Japanese fighter that was smaller than a Zero. something also confirmed by Bruce as fact.

When the Leininger family appeared on the *Larry King Live* TV show on December 22, Michael Shermer, a professional "skeptic," dismissed the story by saying that many boys are interested in planes and so there was nothing unusual in young James' interest. Shermer didn't say much more, but had he been allowed the time he would undoubtedly have said that James subconscious probably absorbed a TV program about World War II and information from that program was surfacing in his dreams and waking consciousness.

In the absence of any TV program about the Natoma Bay with the actual names of pilots named Leon, Walter, Billie, and Jack Larsen, the debunker would likely then question the accuracy and credibility of the reporting, suggesting that a few coincidental "hits" were exaggerated and embellished by the parents once they realized that there was a book to be written. The debunker or closed-minded skeptic will simply laugh it off as anecdotal and not scientific.

Assuming that Bruce and Andrea Leininger are honest and credible observers and reporters, the open-minded person cannot help be impressed by the evidence they have gathered and presented in this book. What are the odds of a young boy, from ages 2 through 5, coming up with so many factual "hits"?

But is it really reincarnation?

"There is reincarnation, but not in the sense in which it is generally expounded," said the eloquent spirit entity calling himself Silver Birch, who

communicated through the trance medium Maurice Barbanell during the middle decades of the last century. Silver Birch went on to explain that the individual personality on earth is a small part of the individuality to which he or she belongs. He likened it to a diamond with its many facets, pointing out that the personality on earth is but one facet of the diamond.

"... there are what you call 'group souls,' a single unity with facets which have spiritual relationships that incarnate at different times, at different places, for the purpose of equipping the larger soul for its work," Silver Birch further explained.

The group-soul concept had earlier been advanced by the discarnate Frederic Myers through the mediumship of Geraldine Cummins. Myers, one of the pioneers of psychical research, purportedly communicated through several credible mediums following his death in 1901. Much of what he had to say through the hand of Cummins is set forth in *The Road to Immortality*, first published in 1932.

"While I was on earth, I belonged to a group-soul, but its branches and the spirit - which might be compared to the roots - were in the invisible," Myers wrote. "Now, if you would understand psychic evolution, this group-soul must be studied and understood. For instance, it explains many of the difficulties that people will assure you can be removed only by the doctrine of reincarnation. You may think my statement frivolous, but the fact that we do appear on earth to be paying for the sins of another life is, in a certain sense, true. It is our life and yet not our life."

Myers went on to explain that a soul belonging to the group of which he was part lived a previous life and built for him a framework for his own earthly life. The spirit - the bond of the group soul - manifests, he said, many times on earth.

"We are all of us distinct," he continued, "though we are influenced by others of our community on the various planes of being." He further explained that a group soul might contain twenty souls, a hundred souls, or a thousand souls.

"When your Buddhist speaks of the cycle of birth, of man's continual return to earth, he utters but a half-truth," Myers went on. "And often a half-truth is more inaccurate than an entire misstatement. I shall not live again on earth, but a new soul, one who will join our group, will shortly enter into the pattern of karma I have woven for him on earth."

Myers likened the soul to a spectator caught within the spell of some drama outside of its actual life, perceiving all the consequences of acts, moods, and thoughts of a kindred soul. He further pointed out that there are an infinite variety of conditions in the invisible world and that he made no claim to being infallible. He called it a "general rule" based on what he had learned and experienced on the Other Side.

Silver Birch also likened the soul to an iceberg in which one small portion is manifesting and the greater portion not manifesting. He apparently was referring to what others have called the "Higher Self," the "Greater Self," or the "Oversoul."

Trying to explain reincarnation to humans, Silver Birch added, is like trying to explain the color of the sky to someone who has been blind from birth. "You have no standard of comparison," he said. However, he stressed that the individuality of the "facets" within the Group Soul is maintained.

In his 1939 book, *Reincarnation for Everyman*, writer Shaw Desmond stated that there are two approaches to reincarnation - the "terrestrial" and the "celestial." The former view has the individual returning again and again as the same man, while the latter view has man "solely as *spirit* and his temporary inhabitancy of the physical body as but a tiny projection of the Greater Self, which is the real man."

When Frederick Bligh Bond, a psychical researcher of the early 1900s, asked a communicating spirit about reincarnation, the spirit replied: "You understand not reincarnation, nor can we explain. What in you reincarnates, do you think? How can you find words? Blind gropers after immutable facts, which are not of your sphere of experience."

Whether or not James Leininger is the reincarnation of James Huston, Jr. may be a matter of semantics and how one defines "reincarnation." One way or the other, the survival of consciousness at death is indicated.