

A Submariner Resurfaces

— Case 59 —

Some phobias can be fairly simple to live with. Many folks have a fear of spiders, for instance, and manage to get by well enough. A fear of enclosed spaces, on the other hand, is a true handicap in this modern age of elevators and airplanes. Likewise, a fear of water can be most inconvenient when one wants to join friends at the beach ... or needs a bath. According to a recent article,¹ claustrophobia and aquaphobia (a.k.a. hydrophobia) are two of the six most commonly experienced phobias. Woe unto the poor soul who suffers from both of these simultaneously.

Bruce Kelly, of Glendora, California, was just such a soul in November of 1987, when he showed up at the office of hypnotherapist Rick Brown. Kelly disclosed that, whenever he was on an airplane, he was overwhelmed with terror the moment the cabin doors were latched. He could think of no reason for this fear. Nor could he explain why he was so very, very afraid of water. He could only shower if his back was to the spray and he was simply unable to force himself to climb into a bathtub. On the few occasions when he had been immersed in water he had become dizzy, nauseous, and suffered from trembling and cramps. On top of all that, he was regularly troubled by stabbing pains in his stomach and chest that no doctor had been able to explain.

Rick Brown was a Certified Hypnotherapist who had successfully treated many patients complaining of inexplicable maladies. Although only about one percent of his patients experienced

past-life recall while regressed, he felt that Kelly could well be reacting to events that had occurred in a previous lifetime. Brown hypnotized Kelly and asked him "to recall the time and place where he was first affected by the terror."

The entranced Kelly responded, "I'm in a submarine ... I'm dying."²

His name, he said was James Edward Johnston. Then he told a fearsome story of death by drowning in a small, lightless, metal chamber, on the 11th of February, 1942. He said his submarine, the *Shark*, SS-174, was submerged near Celebes Island when it was attacked by depth-charges for the second time in two days. This time, he was not on duty because he had been confined to his bunk with two broken ribs suffered during the first attack. This time, the Japanese were more accurate, and Johnston was caught in a rush of seawater as he tried to reach his station. He and all the crew were dead before the submarine had settled on the ocean floor.

These specific details and more were revealed during Kelly's first past-life regression. Not only were all of them confirmed by extensive research,³ the session was successfully therapeutic – his fears of closed spaces and water faded away and he no longer experienced the pains in his torso (apparently caused by his past-life rib injuries).

Although the goal of the hypnotherapy had been reached, the therapist was intrigued by the case and wanted to see what else might surface.

¹ The Ten Most Common Phobias on phobias-help.com

² This exchange is quoted from an article by Rick Brown titled "The Reincarnation of James, The Submarine Man" in *The Journal of Regression Therapy* for December, 1991, pages 62-71.

³ Prior to the Internet, Brown was required to spend many hours searching in libraries, the U.S. Navy Historical Center and Operational Archives, and the Military Reference and Service Branches of the National Archives, in Washington, DC. Of course, the precise whereabouts of Johnston when he died could not be confirmed, as the submarine was not salvaged.

Although he was a born-again Christian at the time, and could not accept the idea of reincarnation, the subject was likewise curious and agreed to further sessions.

These sessions filled out the life of James Johnston with confirmable facts in a way rarely accomplished before or since. (Usually, souls spend a considerably longer time between incarnations, hiding potentially confirmable facts about other lives much further into the past.) Brown was able to confirm the Johnston-personality's description of the battle theater that included such facts as the names or numbers of four other U.S. subs nearby, their base of operations, the mission of the *Shark*, and the full names of two other crewman who went down with him.

That's hardly the end of the story, however. In trance, Kelly/Johnston described much of his youth and the events that led up to his enlisting in the Navy. He spoke of his joining the Civilian Conservation Corps and being sent to Tule Lake in California, and Scottsboro and Guntersville in Alabama.

Born in Jacksonville, Alabama on February 1st, 1921,⁴ he was raised, he claimed, by his unwed mother in one rented bedroom of a company-owned house in the Profile Cotton Mill Village. His mother died young in March of 1936, he said, and he recalled a cousin named Elizabeth in Alabama and a girlfriend named Molly Lassiter, in California. Also, he remembered being especially fond of eating the ends of bread loaves, just as Kelly is currently.

Rick Brown made three trips to Alabama researching the case; on the third, he was accompanied by Bruce Kelly. This trip was

filmed, and was shown, in part, on a segment of *Unsolved Mysteries*.⁵ When Kelly visited the house where Johnston was raised, he recalled that he (Johnston) was only allowed to enter or leave the house via the back door. When they met Johnston's cousin, whose name was, indeed, Elizabeth, she confirmed that the boy was not allowed to use the front door. Then she asked if he remembered always eating the ends of bread loaves.



Commemorative photo honoring the memory of the crew of the Shark (SS-174). — *NavSource Online*

Discussion

It is hard to imagine a more evidential regression case than this one. Kelly's memories of being Johnston are strong and clear. Brown noted Kelly's extreme and realistic discomfort when reliving Johnston's death. With one tiny exception,⁶ no statement out of hundreds has been contradicted by research. The three full names of crewmen, the ship's name and number, and the date

⁴ All dates and places were confirmed.

⁵ Show was titled "The Reincarnated Submariner."

⁶ There seems to be some disagreement over the name of the submarine's cook; a fact easily mis-remembered or mis-recorded.

and location of the sinking were all recalled during the first regression session, before anyone had the chance to look up anything. The scores of facts and intimate details brought to light in later sessions and confirmed by independent investigation negate all feasibility of conspiracy or misrepresentation. Add the rapid alleviation of Kelly's symptoms and this is one of the most convincing cases yet examined.

By the way, does anyone know the history or whereabouts of a woman from Northern California name of Molly Lassiter?

For Further Information

The *Unsolved Mysteries* website: http://www.unsigned.com/ajaxfiles/psy_submarine_reincarnation.htm.

The segment is included on disk one of the collection: *Unsolved Mysteries: Psychics*, available from Amazon.com.

The website: <http://www.ial.goldthread.com> has a copy of Brown's article, a review of the book, and the text of some answers to queries put to Bruce Kelly in January, 2007.



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