

Adult Past-Life Memories Research

Past life memories are typically experienced by very young children, and fade within a few years. However, sometimes they occur with older children and adults, and may persist throughout life. As is often the case with children, adult memories of a past life can sometimes be found to match exactly with real people and events.

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A person who remembers one or more past lives often begins expressing this awareness at two to four years of age, and the memories then fade at the age-range of five to eight years. However, some people retain past-life memory beyond this age, while with others, memories emerge for the first time in adulthood, or re-emerge after a period of amnesia. While the vast majority of reincarnation research focuses on children, researchers have published some 'solved' adult cases (meaning cases in which the memories were investigated and found to correspond with actual people, places and events). Some subjects have published accounts of their own investigations. Adults who remember past lives show many of the same attributes as children, including [behavioural](#) and [physical](#) residues that can often be dated back to childhood. There are also key differences.

Definition and Incidence

For scientific purposes, reincarnation researcher [James Matlock](#) defines an adult reincarnation case as one in which the most abundant memories, or the memories which allow the case to be solved, emerge at the age of ten or more.¹ This is slightly older than the typical age range (five to eight years) at which both general childhood amnesia and past-life amnesia in children who remember past lives occur; thus it is on the adult side of that dividing line.

Psychologist and reincarnation researcher [Erlendur Haraldsson](#) points out, however, that past life memories having begun in childhood and persisting into adulthood are more common than has been thought. Following up child cases investigated by [Ian Stevenson](#) and himself in Sri Lanka and Lebanon, when the children were now full-grown, he found that more than half retained either 'many/clear' memories or 'some/vague' memories, even though they were aware that the memories had faded and/or become fewer.²

Individual cases such as those summarized below show that for some children who continue to remember, the memories can increase. In other cases, adults may regain past-life memories they had as children but have forgotten, or remember a past life for the first time in adulthood. In almost all adult cases there are precursors in childhood such as phobias, nightmares, interests, aversions, habits, past-life related play and creative expressions or mannerisms that relate to the remembered past life or lives. There may also be birthmarks, birth defects, or other congenital conditions that reflect past-life injuries or wounds, and physical resemblances to the previous person.

Absent a comprehensive survey, incidence of past-life memories among adults worldwide is not known with certainty. However, Haraldsson compared surveys he carried out in Iceland with an American survey, finding reported incidences of 'remembering a past life' ranging from 2% in Iceland and 8-9% in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1974 to 10% in Iceland in 2007.³ These claimed memories have not been investigated by researchers.

Attributes

Matlock posits the following differences in how adults and children experience and express past-life memories, based on the body published cases:

- Children's memories, along with related behavioural motivations, seem to penetrate more strongly into their conscious minds, while adults seem to have a stronger mental block against remembering past lives in general, but particularly against knowing their past-life identities.
- Adults' memories more often emerge as a result of cues or triggers.
- Adults more often are in altered states of consciousness, typically trance or dreaming, when memories emerge.
- Adults seem to remember multiple past lives more than children.⁴

Three additional differences noted by Wehrstein are:

- Adults are more likely to remember lives further back in time than children.
- Incidence of remembering multiple past lives well enough to solve more than one seems, so far, to be limited to adults.
- Adults are more articulate in describing past-life experiences, especially their nuances and complexities.⁵

But adults' and children's memories also show common features:

- Both adults and children seem to be motivated to remember past lives due to unfinished business and need for resolution or healing.⁶
- Past lives are remembered in a similar way to current lives, except that autobiographical knowledge – the abstract concept of the life-story as a whole, which can also be used as a mental filing system for accessing memories of specific events – is absent.⁷
- Stevenson found that children remember violent deaths at a much higher incidence than occur generally: 61% of lives remembered.⁸
- From an informal count of adult cases in the literature and online, it would appear that a higher-than-general incidence of violent death is the case with adults too.⁹
- In gender-change cases, more girls remember past lives as men than boys remember past lives as women, by a factor of three to one in Stevenson's collection of cases.¹⁰ Informal observation of adult cases likewise shows more women remember lives as men than men remember lives as women.¹¹
- The memories of both adults and children are often accompanied by the behavioural and physical signs listed above.¹²
- Both adults and children who remember past lives usually identify with their past selves, thinking of them and speaking in first person while

remembering, and often using first person when talking to others in reference to their past lives.[13](#)

- For both adults and children, past lives can be a major influence on current lives.[14](#)

Research History

Frederick Lenz was the first author to truly study adult past-life memories, although several other authors published collections in the early twentieth century.[15](#) Stevenson summed up these and other existing evidence in a paper early in his reincarnation-research career.[16](#)

In 1979, Lenz published a collection of 127 adult cases, focusing on the types of cues that triggered them. In some cases, memories were prompted by a piece of music or other creative work, or an object the person might have come across in the past life; in others the trigger was a visit to a place reminiscent of the past life. The most common stimulus was an encounter with a person who seemed familiar. Lenz also learned that only 10% of his subjects' memories came in the waking state, while 15% came in dreams and 13% during prayer or meditation. However, none of the cases were solved, making their genuineness uncertain.[17](#)

Parapsychology author [David Scott Rogo](#) partially replicated Lenz's findings with a smaller sample of cases. These lacked what Rogo came to call 'the Lenz syndrome', the occurrence of unusual sensory inputs such as a ringing sound or bright lights and colours while entering the past-life remembering state. However, the two samples were similar in many ways:

- triggered by similar types of cues
- occurring during altered states of consciousness
- creating a sense of being in a different time and place
- producing an intuitive sense on the part of the subject that they were past-life memories
- experienced with such vividness that subjects 'became so caught up in the sights and sounds of a past time that they actually became confused between the scene and normal reality'
- containing, in some cases, veridical elements[18](#)

Matlock disagreed with Rogo's contention that the differences between adult and child cases are absolute, arguing instead that they proceed along a continuum of age, with memories more likely to be cued and/or to emerge during altered states of consciousness as subjects grow older, and that exceptions exist on both ends.[19](#) He tested the relationship between age and past-life memory stimulus in a 1989 study.[20](#)

Though most of the adult cases that Stevenson encountered did not satisfy his criteria for evidential strength, some did, including two summarized below. However, Stevenson was criticized for endorsing the Edward Ryall case, having written a positive introduction to Ryall's past-life memoir before completing an investigation.[21](#) Ryall claimed to have had past-life memories in childhood, including seeing Halley's Comet in a previous life, but did not detail them until his

seventies. Many semantic details were verified, giving his memories apparent veridicality, but none of the names he gave, either for his past self or other people he had supposedly known, could be traced in history, obliging Stevenson later to alter his evaluation.[22](#)

Solved Spontaneous Cases

Laure Raynaud

The first solved spontaneous adult case known to have been investigated and published by a third-party researcher was that of Laure Raynaud, who was born in France in 1868. As a child, she rejected the Catholic tenets that she was raised into, insisting on the reality of reincarnation. As an adult, she told others that, in a past life a century earlier, she had lived in a hot, sunny country, probably Italy, in a very large two-storey house with many tall arched windows and terraces above and below, in a sloping park with old trees; that she was chronically ill with a 'chest disease' that made her cough frequently; and that she died when she was about 25. Travelling to Genoa, Italy, on business in 1913, she immediately felt the area was familiar, and with the help of local people discovered a house that matched her memories. A clinching detail was her memory of having been buried within her church rather than the graveyard, a rare honour, confirming her previous identity as Giovanna Spontini, who died of chronic illness in 1809.[23](#)

Guiseppe Costa

Guiseppe Costa, born sometime in the 1880s, wrote about his experiences in a book and was later interviewed by an independent researcher. In his home when he was growing up, jumbled mental images were triggered by a painting that featured a city with towers and a golden dome on the shore of a body of water: armies, ships sailing, banners flying, the noise of a battle, mountains, a sea stretching to the horizon, hills covered with flowers. Costa was unable to make sense of these scenes, but felt he had directly experienced them. When he was ten his father took him to Venice, which immediately seemed familiar. Now a dream placed the images in order: as an officer in a medieval army he'd taken the sea journey from Venice to Constantinople – the city depicted in the painting – and fought in a battle there. Later in life, moved to sleep in a ruined castle in France, he was visited in a dream by a spirit who addressed him as 'Ibleto'. With that clue, and by accessing private historical documents, he was able to identify his former self, Ibleto di Challant, a French noble who had participated in a crusade to capture Constantinople.[24](#)

Ruprecht Schulz

The case of German entrepreneur Ruprecht Schulz, born in 1887, was investigated by Stevenson following Schulz's own self-investigation and verifications. When being scolded as a child he was often observed to make a gesture as if he were shooting himself. His adulthood was marked by odd senses of familiarity with places he visited on business. In his fifties he experienced memories of having been a businessman concerned with ships, and of being in a dark office building in a small port town, looking at account books he had taken from an old safe. In the

memories, realizing he was financially ruined, he picked up a gun and shot himself to death. In Schulz's self-investigation, he started by writing down all the memories that were potentially verifiable, then began contacting officials in small seaports on the northern coast of Germany, asking if they knew of a person that matched the details. He received a positive reply from an informant in Wilhelmshaven, who gave the person's name as 'Kohl', which however Schulz immediately felt was not quite right; a second letter corrected the name to Kohler. This enabled him to contact Kohler's son, who confirmed that the details of his memories were correct. The fact that Schulz recorded his memories in writing before attempting to verify them enabled Stevenson to prove they were uncontaminated by existing knowledge.[25](#)

Ada Kay (AJ Stewart)

Ada Kay, an English playwright using the pen-name AJ Stewart, was born in 1929, and remembered from the earliest age having been killed by blades and staves on a battlefield in a past life. As a child she was upset by a book illustration that triggered a sense of how the death had felt. She felt confusion about why she was a girl, why her surname was not Stewart, and why she lived in a small house rather than a castle. As an adult she was drawn to Scotland, and moved there, absolutely refusing to leave despite the financial difficulties that followed. She repressed the memories, having been told they were impossible, but they kept resurfacing, and the conviction grew that they matched the life of the Scottish king James IV, of the Stewart clan. At age 38 she was invited to visit Flodden Field, the site of the battle in which James was killed. The night before the trip she dreamed vividly of the battle and the death. During the visit, although unfamiliar with the area, she was able to lead others to the precise spot where the king had died. Stewart wrote a past-life autobiography of James IV that was published in 1970,[26](#) and in 1978 published a memoir recounting her past-life experiences.[27](#)

Jenny Cockell

[Jenny Cockell](#) is a British chiropractor and author born in 1953 whose books describe memories of diverse past lives and her attempts, successful in some cases, to track them down. *Yesterday's Children: The Extraordinary Search for my Past Life Family* (1993) describes strong memories from early childhood, in dreams and waking, of a difficult life as the mother of several children, and a pervading sense of guilt at having abandoned them by dying. The memories persisted strongly into adulthood, and intensified as a result of regression hypnosis. Cockell eventually traced the memories to the life of an Irish woman, Mary Sutton, who had lived in a small hamlet north of Dublin. She subsequently contacted and reformed relationships with Mary's now middle aged and elderly children.[28](#) Cockell has solved a second past life, between the life as Mary Sutton and her current life: Charles Savage, a boy killed in a traffic accident. She also described memories of a nineteenth century Japanese girl who drowned at age seventeen, some details of which she managed to verify with the help of local investigators and the media in Japan.[29](#)

Jeffrey Keene

American firefighter Jeffrey Keene was born in 1947 with a distinctive birthmark on his face. As a child, he loved to play soldiers, and once dug a fort in the ground covered with planks. Later he found photos of similar structures that were built during the American Civil War. In 1992, he visited 'Sunken Road', the site of a Civil War battle, and listened to a recorded description of it. Moments later he was hit by a wave of emotion he could not explain which left him tearful and dazed. At a party that same night a palm reader told him this episode was about his death in the battle, 'shot full of holes' (though in fact he felt he had just been wounded). In the course of further research he visited many Civil War battlefields and matched more of the memories with the life of Confederate general John B Gordon (1832–1904). The location of Keene's birthmark matches the location of one of Gordon's wounds, and he bears a striking resemblance to Gordon, as shown on the cover of the book he published on his experiences in 2003.[30](#)

Angela Grubbs

American litigation lawyer Angela Grubbs was born and raised as a fundamentalist Baptist in Atlanta, Georgia in the USA. Despite her religion's denial of reincarnation, she often experienced past-life memories in the form of dreams or visions when exhausted or sick, or during meditations, starting in childhood and continuing into adulthood. She remembered being a woman with two children, living in Lexington, Kentucky in the early twentieth century. With the help of a friend and fellow attorney she decided to approach her own past life in a lawyerly way, amassing evidence to build the case. During one vision she heard the name of her past-life daughter; mentally requesting more names, she remembered those of her past-life self and husband. With the names she was able to use online genealogical records, then library, court and church records in Lexington, to track down her past-life self and family. She also confirmed many details of her memories. Grubbs published a memoir of her search in the style of a mystery novel in 2005.[31](#)

Suleyman Andary

The case of [Suleyman Andary](#) of Turkey was investigated by Stevenson. In his early childhood, Suleyman remembered that he had had children in a previous life, and he uttered their names in his sleep. He also remembered that he had lived in a town named Gharife, and that he had owned an olive press. One day when he was eleven, his grandmother asked to borrow a religious book and he curtly refused. Asked the reason for this rudeness he remembered that in his previous life he had not allowed religious books to leave his house. Prompted by this incident, and by hearing other people speaking of reincarnation, he began a conscious effort to retrieve more memories. He then recalled that his name had been Abdallah Abu Hamdan and that he had been the mayor of Gharife. These and other details were confirmed by residents of the town, who noted that Abdallah Abu Hamdan had died about twelve years before. Aged thirteen, Suleyman visited Gharife, and recognized many people he had known in his previous life.[32](#)

Pratomwan Inthanu

Stevenson also investigated the case of Pratomwan Inthanu of Thailand. According to her father, she had no past-life memories as a child, but became strongly interested in religion, and began meditating at the age of ten. Aged twelve she decided to become a nun, and eventually lived in a series of *wats* (Thai monasteries). At the age of twenty, after practicing *Vipassana* meditation for five months she had a series of visions showing the life and death, at three months, of a baby in a distant village, and the circumstances, including the names of the family and the fact that the baby was buried improperly, outside the cemetery. In 1965 she visited the village and managed to trace the parents of the infant girl. Her detailed knowledge of these matters persuaded the couple that she was the reborn daughter they had lost in 1943. About ten years later, Stevenson learned that Pratomwan had remembered a second short life as an infant at the same time, but lacking confidence had told no one, since this memory contained fewer details. However, such details as there were – the name of the parents, the hometown and that she had died of a disease that caused vomiting – were confirmed.[33](#)

Mukesh Kumar

The Indian writer Krishanand wrote an account of a shift in consciousness in Mukesh Kumar, a ten-year-old Indian boy. This occurred when a visiting brahmin gave his family a talk on right living, following which Mukesh fell down in an apparent seizure. With his eyes still closed, he demanded to be taken to his 'true home', giving a name and the locality. A friend drove him there immediately, and Mukesh began giving directions as soon as they were in the town. When they arrived at the house he indicated, he called a woman's name, and when she opened the door he threw his arms around her waist in the way a husband would his wife, declaring there was enough money to furnish her needs under a pillar of the house. In the ensuing conversation he demonstrated knowledge of information known only to the woman and her deceased husband, sufficient to convince her that Mukesh was her husband reborn. When she left to prepare refreshments, Mukesh suddenly came out of the trance, confused about where he was. Later the space under the pillar was dug up, revealing a small fortune in gold and diamonds.[34](#)

'Will'

Will (not his real name) is a young American who claims to remember some thirty lives, mostly as soldiers of various ranks dating back as far as early ancient Egypt. He spends a substantial amount of his income on antique and reproduction weapons, clothing and other items reminiscent of lives in ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, the American Civil War, both World Wars and other eras, and many weekends re-enacting historic battles. His case for having lived a past life as Wilhelm Emmerich, a non-commissioned officer in Hitler's *Schutzstaffel* (SS) who helped supervise the commission of the Holocaust as an employee of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, was investigated by writer and reincarnation researcher [KM Wehrstein](#), resulting in a paper published in 2019.[35](#) It details vivid and accurate memories of events which were later verified in obscure sources, as well as behavioural signs such as a lifelong fascination with Nazi insignia despite parental disapproval, and some physical signs related to a gunshot wound Emmerich suffered. Wehrstein has published a second paper about Will which

posits a tentative identity for a life in which Will apparently remembers having been a young German soldier who fought and died in World War I.[36](#)

Solved Regression Cases

As an altered state of consciousness, hypnotic trance can enable adults to recall details of past lives, though the risk exists that the subconscious mind, acting on an inhibition against remembering past lives and especially past-life identities, will produce distorted or even confabulated material when asked to recall them, being in a highly suggestible state.[37](#) This may be why, in the [Bridey Murphy](#) case, despite the fact that the subject, Virginia Tighe, accurately remembered many details of life in nineteenth-century Ireland, her claimed previous incarnation was never found in records.

Nonetheless, in some cases memories retrieved by regression have been sufficient to identify a previous life. For example, American detective Robert Snow, while under hypnosis, experienced an image of himself painting portraits, and later spotted one of the paintings he had seen in this vision in a gallery. Putting his professional skills to work, he discovered that many of the memories matched the life of a nineteenth-century portrait painter,[38](#) although he got the names of the painter and his wife wrong. Other solved regression cases have been published including those of George Field [39](#) and William Barnes.[40](#)

KM Wehrstein

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Matlock (2016).
- [2](#). Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 121, Table 12-1.
- [3](#). Haraldsson (2011).
- [4](#). Matlock (2019) 201-13.
- [5](#). Wehrstein (in submission).
- [6](#). Matlock (2019), 209.
- [7](#). Matlock (2019), 133.
- [8](#). Stevenson (2001), 110.
- [9](#). Wehrstein (in submission).
- [10](#). Stevenson (2001), 294 n15.
- [11](#). Wehrstein (in submission).
- [12](#). See Matlock (2019), 201-13.
- [13](#). Wehrstein (2019).
- [14](#). See Matlock (2019), 189-200, and Wehrstein (2019).
- [15](#). E.g., Delanne (1924), Lancelin (1922), Rochas (1911), and Shirley (1936).
- [16](#). Stevenson (1960), 58-65. See n16 for limitations of the cases presented.
- [17](#). Lenz (1979).
- [18](#). Rogo (1985).
- [19](#). See Rogo (1986), Matlock (1988b), and Rogo (1991).
- [20](#). Matlock (1989).
- [21](#). Ryall (1974).
- [22](#). Stevenson (2003). See comment on 230 for the re-evaluation.
- [23](#). Stevenson (2003), 28.

- [24.](#) Stevenson (2003), 14.
- [25.](#) Stevenson (2003), 210.
- [26.](#) Stewart (1970).
- [27.](#) Stewart (1978).
- [28.](#) Cockell (1993).
- [29.](#) Cockell (2008).
- [30.](#) Keene (2003).
- [31.](#) Grubbs (2005).
- [32.](#) Stevenson (1980).
- [33.](#) Stevenson (1983).
- [34.](#) Krishnanand (1968).
- [35.](#) Wehrstein (2019).
- [36.](#) Wehrstein (2021).
- [37.](#) See Matlock (2019), 213-23.
- [38.](#) Snow (1999).
- [39.](#) Steiger & Williams (1976).
- [40.](#) Barnes (2000).