

Past-Life Memories of the Holocaust

Some eleven million people were killed in the Nazi death camps during World War II, so it is not surprising that camp experiences are sometimes recalled by people who remember a past life. Two such cases were investigated by reincarnation research pioneer Ian Stevenson. Others have been reported or referred to in commercial publications.

David Llewelyn

Born in 1970, this English boy never stated explicitly that he remembered living before, but showed evidence of past-life influence in the form of behavioural signs and knowledge he had no way of learning normally. His past incarnation was never identified. After seeing [Ian Stevenson](#) interviewed on the BBC in 1982, David's mother Susan Llewelyn contacted him, sharing the particulars of the case. With Stevenson's encouragement, Susan and David were interviewed on the same BBC program. Unfortunately, this experience left David somewhat traumatized, so Susan refused to let him meet Stevenson at the time. Ten years later, Stevenson approached the family again and finally interviewed mother and son, now a young man, in 1998. He published the case in his 2003 book *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type*.¹

David's nightmares featured black pits full of bodies, people with guns and the stench of dead bodies. He sometimes came to his mother crying, and described images of camps, guns and people dying. Once when visiting an aunt who cooked with gas, he said the smell of the gas was 'like the smell in my room at night; it's going to smother me'. In the BBC interview, he talked about waking images, which included 'prisoner-of-war things' and people living in wooden huts.²

In early childhood, David was averse to sleeping in a small room and compulsively kept the door open and window-curtains closed. When he began writing he wrote right to left, and when he drew he always included a star, though at the same time he had a phobia of stars, particularly the Star of David; once he fled a shop after seeing a Star of David necklace. He had a marked fear of camps; when his mother suggested a family vacation at a camp, he said: 'No. There is no happiness there. People are caged in and cold, hungry, and frightened. They'll never get out.' He told her the people were like skeletons, were bald and had no food. He also mentioned in the BBC interview that they wore 'stripey things'. In connection with the camps he often asked, 'Why did it have to happen?'³ He never, however, said that he had been in one, even when directly asked. All the details of his descriptions, including prisoners wearing striped uniforms, were correct for Nazi death-camps.

David demonstrated knowledge of Jewish customs; as a young child he asked his mother if there was any blood in the food she was serving, and at age nine said of a church-like building the family was passing, 'They wear caps there,' though no one wearing a *yarmulke* was in sight. The building was indeed a synagogue.

At age 28, David had come to believe his images were past-life memories, yet he said he remembered little; he still did remember, however, 'being put in a pit as a young boy and looking up to the top of the pit where he saw another young boy looking at him. He thought the other boy was a companion who might save him. There were other bodies in the pit'.⁴ He showed fear and anger when seeing Germans either in person or on TV, as it would evoke this scene.

Teuvo Koivisto

This Finnish boy was born in 1971 to a mother who felt she remembered two past lives herself, albeit with no verifiable elements, and so was open to her son's statements. Unlike David Llewelyn, Teuvo said outright he had experienced life and death in a Nazi death-camp, and gave vivid details, but showed no Jewish-type behaviours. A Finnish researcher, Rita Castrén, interviewed Teuvo's mother, Lusa Toivisto, in 1976 and then referred the case to Stevenson, who interviewed Lusa in 1978 and Teuvo in 1999. He published the case in *European Cases*.⁵

Lusa recalled two dreams prior to Teuvo's birth that she considered to be [announcing dreams](#); in the more direct one, she was standing in a line of prisoners, then found herself with a man holding a copy of the Kabbalah, among other men who were shooting guns. He said to her, 'The baby you are expecting is a Jew, and I will save your life'.⁶

Lusa reported that Teuvo, at the age of three, had told her he remembered a big furnace in which people were piled in layers. He had been taken to the 'bathroom', where people were having personal objects such as glasses and golden teeth removed. They were then undressed and put into the 'furnace', where gas came pouring out of some place in the walls. He could not breathe, and knew he was going to be put into the furnace. He also described an 'oven' with children in it, and being caught on barbed wire. His mother found the vocabulary he used in describing these scenes surprisingly extensive. He became terrified when relating this, to the point that she tried to distract him with a fairy tale. He continued to repeat these statements for about six months, always when he awoke in the morning.

Teuvo had a fear of the dark up until age seven, and often concealed himself where he could not be found. He also sometimes knocked holes in the walls (which were extremely thin). Starting at age three he began to describe having being gassed, and had occasional breathing difficulties, in which it seemed painful for him to inhale. A physician ruled out asthma. Teuvo was otherwise healthy.

To exclude the possibility that Teuvo had received this information normally, Stevenson looked carefully into what media he could have been exposed to prior to age three, whether he could have heard about death-camps from adults around him, and even how many Finnish Jews had been sent to the camps. He satisfied himself that Teuvo could not possibly have learned the details he described by normal means. Stevenson also found that the given facts were all accurate except that gold fillings were removed after the victims were gassed to death, not before, and that people were gassed before being placed in the furnace. He noted that Teuvo's hiding and wall-breaking behaviours resembled the tactics of Jews in the

Warsaw ghetto, who broke down walls to create passages to the extent that, as one survivor described, 'we could move around an entire residential block without once going into the street'.[7](#)

Teuvo grew up to become a professional musician and music teacher. In 1999, he told Stevenson he no longer experienced memory images of the previous life. The breathing problems ended at age five, but the hiding behaviour lasted until age thirteen or fourteen, and in fact even as an adult, he did not like the fact that his residence had no hiding place. He still felt anxiety at the sight of Nazi uniforms or the Nazi flag.

David Strickland

The case of David Strickland is one of several cases described by Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick in their 1999 book *Past Lives: An Investigation into Reincarnation Memories*. Despite not having been raised Jewish, David was so fascinated with Judaism that he studied the Kabbalah and learned Hebrew well enough to read it. At the age of thirteen, he became morbidly fascinated with the Nazi death-camps, saying: 'I just had to outstare the horror photos of tortured, mangled bodies. ... it took over my life and took away my carefree childhood completely. I had to face down and spiritually confront this evil.' This led to depression so severe that at age eighteen he joined a cult that 'devastated' his life.[8](#)

Later on, Strickland had a spontaneous flash of memory of life as his own great-great-grandfather, which provided an answer to why he had had a lifelong fascination for trains and railways. He then learned to meditate, repeatedly revisiting a peaceful life as a Native North American. These lives helped him make sense of himself. Then one more past-life memory came to him:

I had vivid flashbacks of being inside a prison camp with rows of barracks. I was a thirteen-year-old girl in a ragged grey frock, barefooted on a muddy ground, my left hand holding the right hand of a little brother. The two rows of barracks on the left and right ended at a T-junction, with a building going across my vision. The year was 1944, and I knew I was going to die and that I would never see my brother again. I had another vision where I was ill and being carried on a stretcher at an obscene pace to my place of death. Lying on my back, the roofs of buildings swept past my vision, and the last thing I saw was a tall chimney with black smoke escaping from it.[9](#)

A few days later, Strickland received a letter from a friend with whom he long corresponded on spiritual matters. The friend wrote that it had come to him that both he and Strickland had been victims of the Holocaust.

Yael Shahar

Born in Texas, this author gives the remembered name of her past-life self, Ovadya ben Malka, as co-author of her 2014 memoir, *A Damaged Mirror*.[10](#) As a child, she was haunted by dreams of living in the Nazi death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau as a Greek Jewish teenage boy from Thessaloniki. He was brought to the camp on a transport train, separated from the rest of his family who were all immediately

gassed to death, and made a member of the *Sonderkommando*, the cohort of Jewish prisoners who were made to haul corpses, grind bones, sort the possessions of the dead, et cetera. Eventually he was beaten to death by his captors.

Shahar recalled the number that had been tattooed on her previous incarnation's arm, which would have confirmed his identity had the record still existed, as some still do. She was not so fortunate. Devastated by guilt for having cooperated with his Nazi captors in committing genocide on her own people, and feeling unworthy to worship God, Shahar undertook a journey of healing which led her to engage the help of a rabbi, revisit the camp to perform a confession ritual, and ultimately settled in Israel.

Of her visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau, Shahar writes:

I read the sign near the krema [oven]. It conveyed nothing. It said not a word about the screams from behind the sealed door, or the way the lift creaked and protested as it raised its load of corpses to the upper floor. Or of the mad scramble to empty out the gas chamber before the corpses could grow stiff and make our job more difficult. The sign said nothing of the stench or the need to get the place clean before the next transport arrived. It said nothing of the fear, or the deadness of soul that allowed us to eat surrounded the corpses of our own people. Nor of our inability to feel or weep...[11](#)

Barbro Karlen

Barbro Karlen's case is the one extant famous past life related to the Holocaust, as she claims to have been the iconic Jewish teen diarist Anne Frank.[12](#) A child prodigy writer in her native Sweden, Karlen published her first best-selling book at the age of twelve, and eleven books in total by the age of sixteen. By her own account, as far back as she could remember she had nightmares of men and dogs kicking down the door of a small room she was in; then at the age of ten, during a visit to Amsterdam with her parents, she was able to lead her parents to the house where Anne Frank had lived, and apparently knew it as it had been before, noticing a set of stairs had been changed and pictures that had been on the wall of the room were missing. Karlen writes also that she was introduced to Anne's last living relative, the actor Buddy Elias, by a publisher who did not say anything to either of them about how they might be connected: according to her own account, the two recognized each other immediately, had a tearful reunion, and remained close thereafter.

Will

All past-life experiences of the Holocaust are not from the side of the victims. Writer and reincarnation researcher KM Wehrstein has investigated the cases of 'Will' (not his real name), an American who recalls a past life as Wilhelm Emmerich, a member of the Nazi Schutzstaffel (SS) whose job was helping supervise the 'processing of cargo', as he refers to it when reverting to past-life idiom, mostly at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Wehrstein published a paper on Will in 2019.[13](#)

When she was pregnant with Will, his mother acquired an aversion for the smell of burning meat which stayed with her to the end of her life. As a child, Will was afflicted by nightmares of 'skeleton people', humans so emaciated they looked like skeletons who might 'get him' – a fear that was apparently guilt-induced – and associated it with what he termed the 'smell of death'. He was fascinated with Nazi symbols and began collecting Nazi memorabilia as a child despite parental disapproval, and continues to this day. He did not realize these phenomena might relate to reincarnation until he was exposed to the concept as a young adult.

Will identified his SS incarnation by retaining the memory of an unusual event in the Auschwitz camp: a female Jewish prisoner snatched a gun away from another SS man and shot Will's previous incarnation, leaving him with a permanent limp. Only Emmerich is known historically to have had this happen to him; other facts matched also, including Emmerich shooting a prisoner who made a panicked run shortly before the Allied liberation of the Bergen-Belsen camp, an interrogation of Emmerich by a French interrogator after the liberation, and Emmerich dying of an illness whose symptoms resembled those of typhus, which the historical record gives as his cause of death. Many of his verifications came from difficult-to-access sources which he had no way of accessing as a child or a teen. Will has a limp with no clear current-life cause, which worsens when he talks about Emmerich, to this day.

Rabbi Yonassan Gershom

Rabbi Yonassan Gershom is an American Neo-Hasidic rabbi and author who began to hear accounts of past lives of Holocaust victims in 1981, and since then has received thousands of them, either told to him or sent in letters. He did not investigate these cases or attempt to identify the past incarnations in the way Stevenson did, but rather accepted the accounts as told. He shared many cases of this nature, explored the processes of healing and the spiritual implications of the Holocaust, in three books written in the 1990s.[14](#)

KM Wehrstein

Literature

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1.](#) Stevenson (2003), 80-85. All information in this section is drawn from this source.
- [2.](#) Stevenson (2003), 82.
- [3.](#) Stevenson (2003), 83.
- [4.](#) Stevenson (2003), 85. Stevenson is here quoting from his interview notes.
- [5.](#) Stevenson (2003), 158-64. All information in this section is drawn from this source.
- [6.](#) Stevenson (2003), 159.
- [7.](#) Donat (1979), 96, cited by Stevenson (2003), 163.
- [8.](#) Fenwick & Fenwick (1999), 50.
- [9.](#) Fenwick & Fenwick (1999), 51.
- [10.](#) Ben Malka & Shahar (2014).
- [11.](#) Ben Malka, O. & Shahar, Y. (2014), 393.
- [12.](#) Karlen (2000). All information in this section is drawn from this source.
- [13.](#) Wehrstein (2019). All information in this section is drawn from this source.
- [14.](#) Gershom (1992, 1996, 1999).