

Rylann O'Bannion (reincarnation case)

Rylann O'Bannion is an American girl who remembered dying when an aeroplane crashed through her home. She exhibited post-traumatic symptoms as a young child, starting well before her imaged memories and talk about the previous life. Her statements began to be recorded in writing before the identification of the person she recalled having been. Her description of how she died was consistent with that person's autopsy report. This is one of the best-documented cases of verified past-life memory involving a stranger to the case subject's family.

Jennifer Schultz

Jennifer Schultz was born on 26 June 1971 at the American Air Force base in Landstuhl, West Germany, to which her father was assigned while in the military. Upon discharge, he moved his young family to Kenner, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans and the location of the city's airport.

At eleven years, Jennifer was taking catechism classes at her family's Catholic church. She was self-confident and self-assertive, with an outgoing personality. Because her family was not well off, she did chores for neighbours to earn spending money. She enjoyed playing cabbage ball, a game similar to American softball, which originated in the New Orleans area. She had stunning red hair which she wore long.

On the afternoon of 9 July 1982, Jennifer was sitting in a swing on the open side of her home's carport, talking on the telephone, when Pan American World Airways (Pan Am) Flight 759 took off from the nearby airfield. It was raining and there were thunderstorms over the airfield's eastern end, where the departure runway was situated. At no more than 150 feet of altitude, the aeroplane encountered a microburst; this introduced a wind shear, which in turn imposed a downdraft and decreasing headwind. The plane struck the top of a row of trees and proceeded in an easterly direction before crashing into Jennifer's neighbourhood, less than a mile from the end of the runway.

The descending plane tore a branch off an oak tree across the street from Jennifer's home, engendering a roll to the left. The left wingtip made contact with the earth and ploughed a three-metre-long gash in the ground and adjacent street pavement. A loud explosion was heard. The plane broke apart as it tumbled through the neighbourhood, jet fuel spilling from ruptured tanks on its wings. Fifteen houses on three streets were destroyed, many set ablaze. The first to be hit was Jennifer's – the plane passed directly through the carport where she was sitting, and she was killed.^[1]

Rylann O'Bannion

[James Matlock](#) investigated this case in the autumn of 2018 and wrote about it in his book *Signs of Reincarnation*.^[2] The present account is drawn from that source.

Early Behaviours

Rylann O'Bannion was born on 11 March 2008 in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. She proved to be an exceptional child, sleeping through the night within 48 hours of her birth. She was keenly observant and when the family went out, interacted well with people. She was far more advanced socially than were her siblings at her age.

As soon as she was able to manage it, Rylann pulled drawers from the bathroom vanity unit. She never removed anything from the drawers; she only opened them, examined their contents, and shut them again. Unlike many young children, she enjoyed doing chores and helping about the home. Sometimes she proposed activities more appropriate for an older child.

At eighteen months, Rylann started to be fearful of thunder and lightning. By 24 months, she was no longer sleeping through the night. She would go to her parents' room and get in bed with her mother Cindy; if she was returned to her bed after she had fallen asleep again, this would recur. Soon after the nocturnal waking started, Rylann began sleepwalking. She sleepwalked with increasing frequency until she was about three years old, and thereafter regularly, five or six times per week until she was six.

Rylann had straight hair which she wore long, like Cindy and her older sisters. At 27 months, she began to complain that it hurt her back. Matlock writes,

She threw little fits about her hair touching her back. She did not say the hair tickled or itched her back, but that it "hurt" it. She began to complain that her clothing hurt her neck and wanted tags cut out of her shirts. This behavior persisted as she grew older. Every day when it was time to get dressed for school, Rylann threw fits about putting on shirts. She would throw very dramatic fits when changing shirts and would complain that the clothing hurt her back, neck, and shoulders. She would say that it felt like her skin was burning.^[3]

Evolving Memories

Not long after Rylann began to complain about her hair hurting her back, in May 2010, Cindy hired a photographer to take pictures of the family in the garden of their home. Subsequently she framed several prints and took some to her work. When Rylann first visited the office a few weeks later, she commented on a photo showing her in an ivory dress with a green belt, holding a large white flower (see right). She had been 'bigger' in this picture, she told Cindy.

Each time she visited the office, two or three times a week, Rylann would make a similar comment in regards to the same photo, but she was unable to explain what she meant. When Cindy asked, she would give her a look and walk away. This behaviour continued unaltered for over a year, until July 2011, when Rylann was aged 42 months (three years and five months). According to Matlock,

It was her bedtime and Cindy had read her a book and turned off the light. Rylann asked, "You know when I was bigger in that picture? I was nineteen in that picture. You know, how big Ashlen is." Ashlen, one of her older sisters, was nineteen at the time. Cindy asked, "Rylann, how were you nineteen in that picture when you were born only three years ago?" Rylann was quiet for a moment, then said softly: "Mommy, I died. I was in our backyard. It was raining. I was alone but I wasn't scared. Then the rain shocked me." When Cindy asked what she meant, Rylann explained: "It was raining a lot. There was a loud noise, then the rain shocked me. I floated up to the sky then."^[4]

Over the next several weeks at bedtime, Rylann added new details. On the night following her revelation about having died, she told Cindy that the name Kevin sounded familiar to her. On other occasions, in response to Cindy's questions, she said her family lived in a white house with a big front porch and that they owned a red car. She had worn dresses, of which she had nine.

In July 2013, when she was five years old, Rylann began talking about her memories during the day, usually without any apparent stimulus. Once she looked right at Cindy and said, 'I remember the name Jennifer.'

Early in September 2013 Cindy watched four episodes from the first season of the Lifetime television series *Ghost Inside My Child (GIMC)* with Rylann and her brother Lane, who was then nine. She hoped that seeing other children who recalled previous lives would help Rylann come to terms with her memories. At one point Lane asked Rylann if she thought she had lived in the United States or elsewhere. She replied, 'I think Canada. Canada sounds familiar.' However, within moments, she reversed herself: 'Louisiana sounds familiar. It feels right.'

In February 2014, when Rylann once again complained about her hair hurting her back, Cindy asked if the sensation might be connected to the death she recalled.

Rylann instantly presented a wide-eyed, frightened look, covered her ears, stared down with her eyes closed, and said, "La, la, la, la. I don't want to talk about that! Don't talk about that!" It did not take her long to process the idea, however. On March 4, shortly before her sixth birthday, she walked into the bathroom where Cindy was combing Lane's hair before sending him off to school and asked what year Cindy was born. Cindy said 1971, but why did she want to know? Rylann said, "In my dream it sounds familiar. I was standing there in the yard and saw a plane crash." Cindy said, "In 1971, you saw a plane crash?" Rylann replied, "I don't know when, it's just familiar."^[5]

Finding Jennifer

Two days after this, during her lunch hour at work, Cindy searched online for plane crashes in 1971, in Canada, and finally in Louisiana. Nothing came up in connection to 1971 and nothing of relevance for Canada but there were numerous pages about the Pan Am 759 crash in Kenner, Louisiana, in 1982. The puzzle began to come together: Rylann's talk about rain, thunder, Louisiana, and Jennifer, all made sense now. Moreover, if Jennifer Schultz was eleven in 1982, she would have been born in 1971.

Not wanting to influence Rylann, Cindy at first said nothing about her discoveries, but continued to listen and note down all that she said about the previous life. Over the next few days she said repeatedly that she thought she had been standing by a tree or pole when the plane crashed, that she remembered a park, and that she thought there was water near her home.

In mid-March, when she had a fit about changing shirts, Cindy again asked if there might be a connection between her behaviour and the plane crash. This time Rylann said, 'I don't know – maybe – did I catch on fire?' Cindy replied, 'I don't know. Did you?' Rylann said, 'I think I did.' From this point on, her reaction to changing shirts improved and her fits gradually subsided.

On or about 20 March, Cindy asked Rylann if she wanted to know what she had learnt about the crash. Rylann said yes, so Cindy summarized what she had read online. 'That matches everything I've told you', Rylann responded, adding, 'Canada sounds like Kenner.' Cindy read through the list of victims and when she came to Jennifer Schultz, Rylann remarked, 'I've said the name Jennifer before.' Cindy agreed that she had. 'Was I Jennifer?' Rylann asked. Cindy said she did not know. Rylann was quiet for a bit, then said, 'I think I was Jennifer.'

On 2 April, Cindy asked Rylann what she remembered about how the crash transpired. Rylann said that she recalled seeing the plane's left side and wing go down first, a detail not

mentioned by Cindy, but did not want to talk further about the event.

Ghost Inside My Child

By this time, Cindy had been in contact with *GIMC* producers for over a year. She first emailed them on 17 April 2013, in response to a page about the programme she had come across on the internet. It was this that had prompted her to view the first season's episodes with Rylann and Lane. In summarizing earlier events, Cindy drew on the journal she had been keeping since early August 2011.

Unfortunately that journal has been lost – Cindy had hidden it amongst work papers that were shredded – but because she consulted it in writing the narrative she provided the *GIMC* producers in April 2013, her emails allow for the reconstruction of the early timeline of events. Furthermore, because Cindy kept the producers apprised of new developments on a near-daily basis, her emails furnish a record of the case as it unfolded in the months following April 2013, a period that included Rylann's initial memory of the plane crash and the identification of the tragedy that took Jennifer Schultz's life.

GIMC producers wanted to film Rylann even before her memories were verified but their interest increased after, and preparations were made to take Rylann and her family to Kenner. Rylann's case is one of two featured on the second season of *GIMC* in an episode entitled, 'Wounded in Battle and Lightning Storm Rattle', which aired on 20 September 2014.

The segment showing Rylann and her family in Kenner is heavily edited and reveals little of Rylann's response to being in Jennifer's neighbourhood. A local historian brought in as an authority on the crash explains that Jennifer died in her carport, although he does not say she was on a swing there. We see little of the interaction between Rylann and Evelyn Pourciau, whose house was opposite the Schultz house, but significantly, Evelyn tells the O'Bannions that she had been in the habit of giving Jennifer money for doing small chores. Jennifer would come and offer to wash dishes, vacuum, rake leaves, and so on, in exchange for spending money.

The most consequential event of the day occurred after filming was over, Matlock notes.

Rylann needed to use the toilet, and Evelyn invited her into her house. Rylann walked in the door and through the kitchen to the bathroom without Evelyn having given her directions. Cindy followed her because Rylann was still wearing a microphone and she did not want it to fall off. When Cindy entered the bathroom, Rylann was staring at the vanity. She looked at Cindy and said, 'I know this. I've been here before.' When they emerged, Cindy told Evelyn about Rylann's reaction to the vanity, and Evelyn explained that Jennifer had had the habit of pulling drawers out it. She never removed anything from the drawers; she only looked at what was inside, then closed them again. Cindy laughed and said that Rylann had been doing the same thing in their home since she was a young child.^[6]

When the O'Bannions returned home, Cindy asked Rylann if she knew with whom Jennifer was talking on the phone. Rylann replied that maybe it was Kevin. This is now thought to be incorrect, Matlock says. Jennifer knew boys named Kevin in her school and neighbourhood, but she was not close to either of them. Kevin also was the name of her catechism instructor, who Jennifer would be seeing for her regular class the following morning (Saturday) and most likely it was he that Rylann recalled. It is not yet known to whom Jennifer was speaking on the phone.

After the trip to Kenner, Rylann stopped sleepwalking for a full year and thereafter did so only occasionally. She sleepwalked three or four times in July 2015 but between then and Matlock's visit to the O'Bannions in August 2018, only three or four more times. She still slept with Cindy but no longer needed to be by her side and would fall asleep on her own.

Case Investigation

Following his interviews in Bartlesville, Matlock went to Kenner to try to verify Rylann's memories; he also was on the lookout for [behavioural similarities](#) between Rylann and Jennifer. There was a canal two blocks from Jennifer's house and a park not far distant, perhaps the water and park to which Rylann referred. Jennifer had engaged in sports, especially cabbage ball. Beginning at about four years, Rylann enjoyed playing T-ball, a similar game. She continued to be athletic, and at ten played several sports competitively.

Jennifer's friends asked Matlock if Rylann was good at crafts, because Jennifer had loved crafting. She made crosses which she gave away at Christmastime and she had fashioned owls from yarn perched on sticks for two of her friends. It turned out that Rylann too enjoyed crafting and had created these very things: She made crosses which she gifted her friends and she had created a yarn owl on a stick. Moreover, Matlock learned that Evelyn Pourciau had had a pet parrot, of which Jennifer had been fond. Rylann's favourite animals were rabbits and parrots. She liked to draw parrots, and Cindy sent Matlock the photo of a greenwing macaw she had drawn on a folding fan.

The photograph of Rylann holding the flower meant nothing to Jennifer's friends, however, and Rylann's reaction to the picture remained a mystery until Matlock emailed Cindy a photo he took from the driveway of what had been the Schultz's home, approximating the view Jennifer would have had when she died. When she saw the picture, Cindy realized what must have happened, and sent back a photo taken in the O'Bannions' garden from the spot Rylann had been standing when the photo of her holding the flower was snapped. The two pictures are presented for comparison in Figure 1. At the top is that which Matlock took in Kenner; at the bottom is the view that Rylann had of her garden in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

Figure 1. Comparison of view from Schultz driveway (top) with view Rylann had of her garden when the picture of her holding the flower was taken (bottom). Both photos were taken in August, 2018.

The oak tree was substantially larger in 2018 than it would have been in 1982, but it is on the left side, whereas the utility pole is on the right. In the O'Bannions' garden there is in addition a large tree in the foreground, whose position matches a tree that has since been removed from the front of the lot in which the Schultz house stood. This tree can be seen in Figure 2, which depicts the scene the morning after the tragedy.

Figure 2. View of the devastated Schultz house on 10 July 1982, the morning after the plane crash that took Jennifer Schultz's life. (Photo taken by a neighbour, John Williams.)

The photo in Figure 2 was taken at an angle from across the street and so has some distortion, but the relationship of structures is clear enough, as is the tremendous damage done by the crashing plane. The Schultzs' white Volkswagen estate car, visible in the



driveway behind the yellow response vehicle, indicates where their driveway was. The carport was demolished along with half of the house, to which it was joined.

The debris field from the crash was so substantial that Jennifer's body was not recovered for three days, by which time press coverage had moved on to other issues. Matlock searched through news stories but could find nothing that placed Jennifer on a swing in her carport at the time of the crash, stated how she was killed, or where her body was found. Her friends were uncertain about these things as well – most assumed that she had been struck by the plane and her body flung into the streets beyond her home.

When Matlock interviewed Rylann she was ten years old, but she claimed still to have clear memories of sitting on the carport swing, talking on the telephone, when she saw the plane hit the oak tree and make the gash in the yard and street. This was the last thing she recalled having seen. She speculated that Jennifer had been electrocuted over the telephone line – a revision of her earlier statement that the rain had 'shocked' her, after which she had 'floated up to the sky'.

Matlock obtained Jennifer's autopsy report from the Jefferson Parish Coroner's Office. The report stated that her body had been recovered from the carport floor. Her body was 100% charred, but there was no sign of smoke inhalation in either the trachea or the blood; thus, she must have died before the fire reached her.

The crashing plane cut through the power and telephone lines running along the utility



poles on the street in front of the Schultz's house, so do not appear in Figure 2. The power lines were strung above the telephone lines and Matlock was told that in this neighbourhood in 1982, power lines were not insulated. If the uninsulated power line had come into contact with the telephone line, Jennifer might indeed have received a shock over the phone line. Rylann's memory of electrocution may be correct, although this this cannot be determined with certainty because the burns sustained by Jennifer's body would have erased all traces.

Analysis

In discussing this case, Matlock observes although some of Rylann's statements and behaviours might be coincidentally related to Jennifer, 'we must ask how many seeming coincidences may occur before we decide that, taken together, they point to something beyond coincidence'.^[7]

Rylann made altogether 32 discrete statements relating in some way to Jennifer, of which Matlock judged 24 to be correct, substantially correct or plausible. Eight were incorrect or implausible but of these, only four were demonstrably false or highly implausible.^[8]

The four statements that were demonstrably false or highly implausible were: she lived in a white house with a big front porch (the Schultz house was brick and had a small front porch, as can be seen in Figure 2); her family owned a red car (the car was white); she had nine dresses (undetermined, but thought by her friends to be improbable); and that perhaps Jennifer was talking on the phone to Kevin (believed to be wrong). Rylann made none of these four false statements more than once, and she made the first three in response to Cindy's asking if she remembered anything more about Jennifer.

Four other incorrect statements may be attributed to mental distortions and confusions rather than to faulty memory. These include: she was in her back yard (garden) when she died (this early statement appears to be due to Rylann's conflation of her view of the

O'Bannion garden as she posed for her picture in the ivory dress with Jennifer's view from the carport); she was standing in the yard when she saw a plane crash (a near-repetition of the last statement, explicable in the same way); she was near a tree or pole or hiding behind a tree (often repeated, with variations – although Jennifer was not near a tree when she died, trees and a utility pole would have figured prominently in her view from the carport); she thought she might have lived in Canada (may be construed as correct if 'Canada' is a stand-in for 'Kenner').

The 24 correct or plausible statements range from ones that would be applicable to many people to the highly specific and personal (eg, she was sitting on a swing in the carport while talking on a phone when she saw the plane coming towards her, the last thing she recalled having seen).

A notable feature of this case is the way Rylann's memories gradually improved, from her early conflation of images to her realization that she was electrocuted not by the rain but over the telephone line. One might suppose that this improvement occurred thanks to her learning things in a 'normal' way, but the detailed timeline makes clear that this is too simplistic an explanation. Some of the later improvement doubtless occurred thanks to things she learned in Kenner, but because no one knew or even suspected the details she related, it appears that these merely assisted her memories to become clearer.^[9]

Moreover, 'Inability to remember an important aspect of the traumatic event(s)' is a feature of post-traumatic stress disorder,^[10] a diagnosis which fits Rylann.^[11]

Matlock notes that Rylann's behaviours are of two types – habitual patterns (pulling drawers from the bathroom vanity unit, offering to do chores, etc) and those that suggest extreme anxiety or stress (nocturnal awakenings, sleepwalking, wanting tags cut out of her shirts).^[12] Nothing in Rylann's early life can account for these signs of trauma, which began to appear when she was about two and continued until she was six years old. They would, however, be appropriate for a person who had suffered a sudden physical blow, such as an electrocution.

James G Matlock

Literature

Matlock, J.G. (2019). *Signs of Reincarnation: Exploring Beliefs, Cases, and Theory*. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Matlock, J.G. (In press). Two American reincarnation cases with post-traumatic stress symptoms related to death in the previous life: Rylann O'Bannion and Scott Perry. In *Is There Life after Death? Vol. 2*, ed. by L. Ruickbie & R. McLuhan.

Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Matlock (2019).
2. ^ Matlock (2019), 1-33. See the full report for details about this case and its investigation not given in the present article.
3. ^ Matlock (2019), 3.
4. ^ Matlock (2019), 3-4. It seemed to Matlock that Rylann did not mean to say that she thought she was nineteen, merely that she was bigger than her present size, like her older sister Ashlen, who was nineteen at the time. Cindy agreed with this interpretation.

5. ^ Matlock (2019), 6.
6. ^ Matlock (2019), 10.
7. ^ Matlock (2019), 50.
8. ^ The figures cited here follow Matlock (2019, 31-32). Not all correct and incorrect statements are mentioned in the present article.
9. ^ Matlock (in press).
10. ^ For the diagnosis of PTSD in children under six, see [here](#).
11. ^ Matlock (In press).
12. ^ Matlock (2019), 32.