

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE GOOD DOCTOR COMES TO TOWN

“Dust thou art, to dust returnest
Was not spoken of the soul.”

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

As recently as two years ago, the skeptic in me would have been appalled by the mention of “reincarnation” or “parapsychology,” yet today I jumped out of bed eagerly anticipating the arrival of the leading researcher in the field. Perhaps today would be the day when Michael and I would finally receive answers to the questions that had been plaguing us for the past two and a half years.

Jim B. Tucker, M.D., an associate professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia School of Medicine was our greatest hope for a reasonable explanation as to what was going on with our son. We were still recovering from the trauma of our pastor insinuating that Christian was possessed by the spirit of a dead person. My initial inquiry to Dr. Tucker a few

THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

months prior had really been a plea for help in our quest to understand our five-year-old son's peculiar behaviors.

When Dr. Tucker's book *Return to Life: Extraordinary Cases of Children Who Remember Past Lives* was released in 2013, I devoured it from cover to cover in two days. It is a straightforward, analytical account of several cases that Dr. Tucker had personally investigated using the strict scientific methodology instituted by his predecessor, Dr. Stevenson. Dr. Tucker's goal in each case was to determine what the child had said, how the parents had reacted, whether the child's statements matched the life of a particular deceased person, and whether the child could have acquired the information through normal means—such as books, movies, or overheard conversations.

Reading about other American children with parents like us, who did not believe in reincarnation before their own personal experiences, is what inspired me to send Dr. Tucker an e-mail outlining Christian's odd statements and behaviors. The fact that the families featured in Dr. Tucker's book had the option of changing their names to protect their identity eased our apprehensions about having Dr. Tucker come to our home to interview Christian. The last thing we wanted was to destroy our son's life by having kids on the playground or baseball fields find out about our family secret.

Jim told us there was somewhat of an urgency to his visit because Christian was approaching the age when the memories and associated behaviors start to fade for the majority of children who recall previous lives. I was a little worried that we had already missed the window that Dr. Tucker was referring to because Christian had recently said before falling asleep, "It's hard to remember when I was a tall baseball player because God gave me a new

brain now.” The vivid images he had shared with us were becoming foggy in his mind in a way I imagine must have felt like trying to grasp the details of a dream as they drift away into oblivion.

Dr. Tucker, who prefers to be called Jim, knocked on our door at 9 A.M. on Wednesday, April 2, 2014, as promised. He had flown into Los Angeles the night before and would fly back to Virginia after our meeting. Christian bounced his way to the front door but waited for me to open it. His hesitance was partially due to the latch we had installed at the top of the door, which was still above his grasp, but primarily because he was nervous about meeting Dr. Tucker. Under normal circumstances, he would have grabbed a chair from the dining room to open the door for himself. We were greeted by a soft-spoken man with a generous smile and a subtle Southern accent left over from his childhood days in North Carolina, where he was raised as a Southern Baptist.

When Michael returned from dropping off Charlotte at school, he shook hands with Jim and excused himself to his makeshift office in our dining room. Even though he was just as curious about Dr. Tucker’s evaluation of our son as I was, Michael liked to pretend that this “past-life thing” was mine, not his. Behind the scenes both Michael and I found solace in the fact that Jim had come from a religious background similar to our own. In a strange way, it made us feel less guilty about entertaining the idea that our son had lived before.

Jim arrived with a handwritten spreadsheet of Christian’s statements, which he had extrapolated from our e-mail exchanges leading up to his visit. He was very methodical, scientific, and gentle in his approach, in a Mister Rogers sort of way. After getting acquainted Jim

THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

suggested we play a little baseball out in front of our house to put Christian at ease. Jim threw on a baseball glove for a game of catch, and before long the three of us were in a full-fledged baseball game in the middle of our street. Christian barely noticed that Jim was interviewing him as I ran the bases and they tried to get me out.

“What did your mother cook for you when you were a tall baseball player?” Jim asked.

“She knows,” Christian pointed at me, “because she was my mom when I was Lou Gehrig.”

It was slightly awkward because I hadn’t told Dr. Tucker about Christian saying that I was his mother in his previous life, but he didn’t appear surprised by the remark. It was a conversation that would have seemed bizarre to anyone but Jim, who was well versed in the subject.

As somewhat expected Christian was shy about talking to a stranger about his past life as Lou Gehrig. Every time Christian had spoken about being a tall baseball player in a previous life, it had been right before falling asleep at night or just after waking up. I figured the odds of uncovering any new information at this time of day would be slim. Dr. Tucker had told me that he never expects to reveal new information in an interview setting because spontaneous recollections of a past life can’t be forced on the spot. He had also said many of the children in the cases that he and Ian Stevenson studied spoke about their past-life memories when they were drowsy. Despite the fact that Christian was far from drowsy, Jim continued to ask him questions after we moved our outdoor baseball game into the living room. Then came a question I found disconcerting.

“Do you remember how you died?” Jim asked Christian.

The Good Doctor Comes to Town

I'd never asked Christian about dying before, so this was brand-new territory for me. Christian's response shocked me even more than Jim's question. In a matter-of-fact tone, Christian replied:

"My body stopped working, and I didn't feel anything."

"Then what happened?" Jim asked.

Christian threw a tennis ball against the wall above our staircase, dove across the floor to catch it, and replied, "After I died, I became Christian."

Christian threw another ball, dashed over to the landing to retrieve it, and then said out of the blue, "I picked her to be my mom, and then she got old."

"When did you pick her?" Jim asked calmly.

"When she was born."

"Do you remember where you were when you picked her?"

Without hesitation Christian said, "In the sky."

I was trying my best to stay calm through all this and now, I had a question too.

"What happened between the time you picked me to be your mother and the time when you were born and I was 'old'?"

He shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don't know. I don't remember."

Just when I was starting to think Christian was making the whole thing up, Jim stunned me by saying, "The memories children report of the time between lives often seem very incomplete, but many children in the cases we've studied do recall choosing their parents." Jim went on to say that Christian's response that he was "in the sky" was consistent with reports from other children who had claimed to have chosen their parents before being born. This unexpected revelation gave me a brand-new

THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

perspective on life and death. It was the first time I had considered the possibility that we choose to be born and even have a hand in selecting our parents.

While Christian continued his indoor baseball routine, Jim and I excused ourselves to discuss the more esoteric concepts from his book, such as quantum physics and the role of the soul in human consciousness.

“You can think of the human body as a radio,” Dr. Tucker said. He clapped his hands together as if simulating an explosion and said, “If you smash the radio, it loses the ability to play any music. However, this does not mean that the radio waves have disappeared. There’s just nothing to receive them.”

“Aha! So when a body dies, the soul still exists in a form that we can’t see?”

Jim nodded. “Precisely!”

I told Jim that I was particularly intrigued by a case he had described in his book, *Return to Life*, of a young boy who had specific memories of being the legendary golfer Bobby Jones in a previous lifetime. This case study hit home with me because this seven-year-old golf prodigy had told his parents at the age of three that he had been Bobby Jones when he was “big.” The boy further surprised his parents when he provided historically accurate details about the life of Bobby Jones, which he had never been exposed to, much like Christian’s revelations about the life of Lou Gehrig. This child also showed a proficiency at golf that was far beyond his years, winning 41 out of 50 junior golf tournaments at the age of seven while competing against kids who were much older. The other uncanny similarity was the fact that Lou Gehrig and Bobby Jones—born in 1903 and 1902 respectively—had both suffered crippling health conditions that had led to their untimely deaths.

I knew from reading Dr. Tucker's book that, for their research purposes, the University of Virginia's Division of Perceptual Studies does not generally consider cases of children purporting to have been famous people because there is a higher probability of the child obtaining the information through books, movies, or overheard conversations. Dr. Tucker said that the combination of this young golfer's reported memories coupled with his prodigious talent for golf is what led him to accept the case as valid past-life remembrance, despite the fact that Bobby Jones was a famous person.

Michael and I had never considered Christian to be a prodigy in the traditional sense of the word, but he did seem to come into the world with a type of "remembering." In his theory of reminiscence, Plato asserted that "knowledge easily acquired is that which the enduring self had in an earlier life, so that it flows back easily." I told Dr. Tucker about a theory I had come across from Edgar Cayce, the renowned Christian mystic, that many child prodigies with a talent beyond their years are born with a conscious recollection of this ability that had been developed in a previous life. I told him I had read that Cayce found it particularly true in cases where a child is born into a family with no affinity for the expressed talent, such as George Frideric Handel, who displayed early musical talent and became a skillful musician, despite the fact that he had been strictly forbidden by his parents to play any musical instrument. Jim told me that his mentor, Dr. Ian Stevenson, had come across many children in his studies who displayed skills that seemed to be carried over from a previous life. I wasn't totally ready to ascribe Christian's early baseball skills to a past life, but it was starting to seem like a plausible explanation.

THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

As Dr. Tucker packed up his briefcase, I seized the moment to tell Jim about the angel Lailah from the Babylonian Talmud and how she extinguishes the memories of the soul before birth by pressing upon the child's lip and saying "shhh."

"I like to think that the angel Lailah just didn't press quite hard enough on some children's lips," I told Jim, "so they come into this life bearing soul memories from a previous lifetime."

Jim then shared the story of the River of Forgetfulness from Plato's *The Republic*. Dr. Tucker said many ancient Greeks believed that souls were made to drink from the River of Forgetfulness before being reincarnated so that they would not remember their past lives.

"This amnesia serves a purpose because it allows the individual to embark on the new life unencumbered by echoes of the past," he said.

I asked Jim if he had any theory as to why the majority of children who remember past lives recall lives of individuals who died at a young age.

"Dying young in a previous life increases the likelihood that a child will come into the world with memories of the prior lifetime." Among the University of Virginia's 2,500-plus documented cases of children who remember past lives, the median age of death in the previous life is 28 years old. Dr. Tucker explained, "The endings of the past lives tend to be like dreams that end prematurely."

He said the best analogy to describe what is happening with these children is to imagine that they are being abruptly woken up in the middle of a dream and then quickly falling back asleep to continue the same dream in the next lifetime. Dr. Tucker believes emotional connections or unresolved emotional issues may affect where

the individual comes back in the dream, or in the next lifetime.

“It is quite common for a child to return to the same family if there are strong or unresolved emotional connections to family members from the previous life,” he explained. “In same-family cases, it appears the children come back to the same dream to continue the story with their families, in a different role.”

The most promising element of Dr. Tucker’s book, *Return to Life*, was that in every single case, there came a time when the child’s past-life memories ceased. When I brought up this topic with Jim, he said, “We often see the associated behaviors fade as well around the time the child reaches six or seven, eight at the latest.”

His words gave me hope to cling to. I longed for the day when Christian would say to me the words a child in Jim’s book had said to his mother, “Mommy, I just want to be me, not the old me.” Christian had shown progress in that regard when he’d said he wanted to be a “new guy like Matt Kemp,” but he wasn’t quite there yet.

Before departing Jim honored my request to sign my copy of his book, and the inscription read: *Cathy, thank you for sharing Christian’s story with me.*

I thanked Jim for making the trip, and Michael took a break from his computer to say good-bye. After giving Jim a departing hug of appreciation and encouraging Christian to do the same, I said:

“I find your scientific approach to the subject of reincarnation comforting because it doesn’t feel unorthodox and New-Agey like the past-life regressions I’ve read about where people go under hypnosis to access past-life memories.”

THE BOY WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

Jim surprised me by saying, “Most of the time hypnotic regression seems to produce fantasy, but there are a few rare cases where people came up with accurate information from the past that’s very hard to explain.”

Hearing this tiny bit of optimism toward past-life regressions from someone whom I considered to be a highly intelligent and rational person made me wonder. *Should I give this past-life regression thing a try?* My mind was still reeling from Christian’s new revelation that he had chosen me to be his mother when I was born and from Jim’s confirmation that many children who recall past lives also remember choosing their parents. A longtime friend of mine named Tracy had been encouraging me to do a past-life regression ever since I had told her about Christian insisting that I was his mother when he was Lou Gehrig, but I had never seriously considered doing it until this moment.

That night I playfully asked Christian as I was putting him to bed, “Do people get to choose if they want to come back as a person or an animal?”

With a big smile he replied, “Of course not, Mommy! God decides that. You *do* get to pick your parents.”

Christian’s next comment really made me think. He said with certainty, “It’s not a talking situation, though, because there are no words there.”