

The Policeman And The Painter

The Survival Files — Case 19 — ESS = 263

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Captain Robert L. Snow, Commander of the Homicide Branch of the Indianapolis Police Department, veteran of 30-years on the force, and author of four books on police procedures, thought of himself as a down-to-earth, street-wise, and rational cop. So, when he underwent regression hypnosis — as a result of a colleague's dare — he felt more than a little foolish and a lot like he was wasting his time.

He was astonished, therefore, when, after spending an uncomfortable half-hour on a psychologist's couch, he suddenly found himself standing almost naked on the slope of a mountain. For a brief time, he experienced the life of a primitive man struggling to survive in an ancient forest before dying in a lonely cave.

Soon afterwards, the scene shifted and he was standing before an easel, paintbrush in hand, studying a somewhat hunchbacked woman by gaslight. In briefly living several scenes from this life, Snow discovered that the artist resided in a large city in the late 1800s, spent some time in France, was recognized as a talented portrait painter although he didn't care to paint portraits (he did so only because they paid well), and many other mundane facts. When the hypnosis session was concluded, the image that stuck in Snow's mind most forcefully was of the painting of the hunchbacked woman in a long gown that he had seen, nearly completed, on the artist's easel.

Captain Snow was surprised, to say the least, that he had actually entered a hypnotic trance and experienced several highly realistic creations of his subconscious mind. But that was all that he was willing to admit. Nevertheless, as days passed, he couldn't get his thoughts off of the session. Finally, he decided that the painting he could remember so vividly was the key. If he could prove that he had seen the painting somewhere before in this, his 20th-century-policeman's life, then he might be able to forget about possible past-lives and move on with the present one.

Assuming the task would prove to be simple because the picture must be famous, Snow went to the art section of the city library and commenced to scan the picture books. He failed to find a picture of the painting. In fact, after many months of intense detective work and hundreds of hours spent in art libraries and art galleries, all he found was frustration. So, when his wife suggested that some time off might be useful, he agreed to a short vacation in New Orleans. And there, in a city he had never before visited, off an obscure street in the French Quarter, in the far corner of the front parlor of a small art gallery, Captain Robert L. Snow came suddenly face to face with artist J. Carroll Beckwith's portrait of a slightly hunchbacked woman in a long gown. It was perched there on an easel almost exactly as he had last seen it, some 100 years before. "I stared open-mouthed at the portrait," he later wrote, "reliving an experience I'd had once when I grabbed onto a live wire ... huge voltage surged up and down my arms and legs. ... There was absolutely no doubt at all that this was the portrait I had seen myself painting while under hypnosis." But his no-nonsense side refused to go away; Snow's next thought was: "Now I just had to find a logical explanation for everything."

What he found from the gallery owner was that the painting had been part of a private estate from the time of its creation and was never in the public eye until purchased by the gallery. What he found from several more months of investigation was that Beckwith's career matched the data from the hypnosis sessions in at least 28 particulars and nothing he could find contradicted his impressions except for Mrs. Beckwith's first name (which he had been uncertain

of from the first). Most of these facts were preserved only in Beckwith's private journals and had never been published. Finally, even Snow was forced to admit that there really was no "logical explanation" and that, as he said when telling of his visit to Beckwith's grave: "I realized I had nothing to be frightened of ... I knew there couldn't be any ghosts or spirits here because the spirit that had been in Beckwith's body was now in mine."

Discussion

An analysis of this case, and more details, may be found on pages 168-173 of *The Survival Files*.

For Further Information

See *Looking for Carroll Beckwith* by Robert L. Snow, 1999.

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