

Supingkalad, Tony @ SDS

**From:** Supingkalad, Tony  
**Sent:** Thursday, October 26, 2006 2:05 PM  
**To:** Truong, Richard @ SDS  
**Cc:** White, Paul @ SDS; Tovar, Reuben @ SDS  
**Subject:** Emailing: cover\_feature\_24\_3.html



One of America's Longest-running regional magazines ( Since 1968 )



Feature Story

**The Past Life Memories of James Leininger**

**If he wasn't born yet, how could a 6-year-old Lafayette boy possibly remember a plane crash that occurred off the Japanese coast during World War II?**

*By Wes Milligan*

*"When a child speaks of a past life memory, the effects ripple far. At the center is the child, who is directly healed and changed. The parents standing close by are rocked by the truth of the experience – a truth powerful enough to dislodge deeply entrenched beliefs. For observers removed from the actual event – even those just reading about it – reports of a child's past life memory can jostle the soul toward new understanding. Children's past life memories have the power to change lives."*

– Carol Bowman, author of *Children's Past Lives*

Parents are usually quite concerned when their children have nightmares. The tears alone on the face of a child are enough to tug at the heart. Eventually, after the parents comfort their children and allay their fears, the children close their eyes and fall back asleep. Things return to normal, and the nightmares are forgotten.

However, when the nightmares began four years ago for 6-year-old James Leininger of Lafayette, his parents, Bruce and Andrea Leininger, were troubled. The nightmares were coming as much as four times a week, and James would violently kick and scream with his feet up in the air. It appeared as though he was fighting with something or buried in a box, trying to get out. The only way he could escape the nightmares was for his parents to shake him awake. The nightmares were out of control.



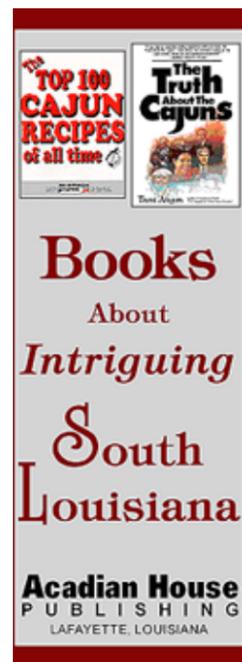
*James Leininger has been fascinated with airplanes since before he was 2 years old. Above, left: James, at age 6, enjoys a moment at the controls of a plane. Above, right: James Huston Jr., whose tragic death during World War II is remembered in detail by young James Leininger, pauses for a picture sometime in 1944, the year before he was shot down.*

But it was what James would utter during his thrashing nightmares that would make the hair on the back of his mom's neck stand up.

"He would say, 'Airplane crash on fire, little man can't get out,'" Andrea says.

Bruce and Andrea began to rack their brains about the source of the disturbing information, which they believed was fueling these nightmares. An educated couple, Bruce and Andrea had always tried to create a "Mozart for the mind" atmosphere for their child and had strenuously kept violence away from his sight. So they began to analyze their dinner conversations, what James was watching on television, and other things that could influence him. Bruce and Andrea weren't involved in aviation, and their 2-year-old boy couldn't read yet. There had to be a logical explanation.

Looking for answers, Andrea began to seek help outside of their home. The nightmares weren't going away, and the Leiningers didn't know what they could do to stop them. The possible cures seemed few, and it even crossed Bruce's mind that an exorcism might be necessary if the nightmares didn't end.



- Home
- About Acadiana Profile
- Current Issue
- Previous Issues
- Tourism
- To Subscribe
- To Advertise
- Where To Buy The Magazine
- Contact Us
- Writers' Guidelines
- Help Wanted



Then Andrea's mother, Barbara Scoggin, suggested an explanation that later seemed to be the right answer: James might be experiencing a past life memory.

After reading about a counselor by the name of Carol Bowman from Pennsylvania, Ms. Scoggin explained how Ms. Bowman was an expert on a child phenomenon that was similar to what James was experiencing. Ms. Bowman had also authored a book, *Children's Past Lives: How Past Life Memories Affect Your Child*, after her own son had similar problems with nightmares and strange recollections.

Andrea called her immediately. Then after several discussions with Ms. Bowman, Andrea took her advice and began to talk to James about his nightmares right after they happened. As a result, Andrea says, the nightmares decreased drastically.

"When we are dreaming, our conscious minds are not filtering material as when we are in a waking state, so unconscious material, including past life memories, emerge," Ms. Bowman explains. "It is not uncommon for young children to dream of their previous lives. We tend to notice the nightmares, because they disturb the sleep and are often dramatic, realistic stories, as in James' case. They are often recurring, as the child relives the same dramatic events over and over. On some level, they are seeking resolution to these disturbing memories. When Andrea acknowledged what James was remembering in his dreams – his plane crashing – it helped him move through the trauma."

But the side effect, which Ms. Bowman expected, was that James' statements about the crashing airplane and the man who couldn't get out became more detailed, more real to him.

Now, during the day, James began to consciously mention how "his" plane took off from the water and the Japanese shot down his plane. He even began to be more specific with plane designations and the name of an aircraft carrier that was stationed near Japan during World War II. The eerie and specific details caused Bruce to take up a research quest with Andrea's help to disprove all of James' "facts."

Through all of their research, spanning nearly five years with thousands of declassified documents, personal interviews and military resources, Bruce and Andrea Leininger say they are now finally sure of one thing: Their son is linked with the spirit of a World War II Navy pilot by the name of James M. Huston Jr., who died in 1945.



*Bruce and Andrea Leininger pose for a portrait with their son, James. The parents say they believe their son has been touched by the spirit of a World War II pilot named James Huston Jr.*

#### **Peculiar 'coincidences' observed from the beginning**

Bruce and Andrea say they began to see signs of a spirit linked with their son when James was 20 months old. While moving from Richardson, Texas, to Lafayette in February of 2000, Bruce took James to the Cavanaugh Flight Museum in Addison, Texas. Andrea says planes had always been his fixation: He spent hours playing with toy planes and he would yell when he saw a real plane in the air.

Bruce recalls his son being mesmerized with the planes at the museum; the boy kept wandering back to the World War II section of the museum. When he tried to take James away from the exhibit, after being there for nearly three hours, James put up a fuss and started to cry. To satisfy his curiosity and to calm him, Bruce bought him a Navy Blue Angels flight demonstration videotape at the museum. James played it so much that he practically wore it out.



*James Leininger signed his drawings "James 3" before his father knew about James Huston Jr.*

In April of 2000, after getting settled in their new home in Lafayette, James' nightmares began. Bruce and Andrea at first attributed their son's nightmares to being in a new home with unfamiliar sounds. But when they didn't stop, the parents' interest went to a whole new level.

Meanwhile, the furniture suffered from James' toy plane collection. James would crash his toy planes into tables and chairs, Andrea recalls with laughter as she points to the numerous nicks on the living room table. The table served as a landing strip for his planes. Crashing became such an obsession to James that whenever someone mentioned flying, James would blurt out, "Plane crash on fire," which Andrea says unnerved her.

But still, Bruce and Andrea admitted, these actions were similar to those of any child growing up – that is, until James became really specific with details of his nightmarish crash.

From July to September of 2000, James began to tell his parents that the plane in his nightmares was shot down by the Japanese after it had taken off from a ship on the water. When James was asked if he knew who the pilot was, he simply replied "James."

Andrea asked James what type of plane he was flying in his dreams, and he said it was a "Corsair." Then, after repeated attempts to push for more information right after the nightmares, Bruce and Andrea got the word "Natoma."

On a whim to try and make sense of it all, Bruce did a simple Internet search for the word Natoma. The result: there existed an aircraft carrier by the name of U.S.S. Natoma Bay, stationed in the Pacific Ocean during World War II. Bruce thought then it was just a coincidence.

In October of 2000, another piece of the puzzle came clear. After another nightmare, James gave his parents the name of Jack Larsen, and he said it was Larsen who flew with James.

The next month, James relinquished another piece of information, which floored his



already-skeptical father. Bruce was thumbing through a book, *The Battle For Iwo Jima*, by Derrick Wright, which he had recently received from a history book club. While Bruce was inspecting the book, James jumped into his lap to watch cartoons. While waiting for the cartoons to come on, James looked at the book with his dad. Suddenly, James pointed to a map of Iwo Jima near Chichi Jima and said, "Daddy, that is where my plane was shot down." Bruce says he almost keeled over.

*James Huston Jr., a World War II fighter pilot, as he appeared on Feb. 7, 1945, about one month before he was killed in action.*

Weeks later, after several more Internet searches, Bruce stumbled upon a website that referred to the Natoma Bay Association. He contacted a Leo Pyatt, who later said he was a radioman on an Avenger fighter plane with the VC-81 squadron.

Bruce couldn't hold in the questions. He asked Pyatt if there were any Corsairs flown on the Natoma Bay. Pyatt said no – only Avengers and Wildcats. Bruce then asked if he had flown any missions near Iwo Jima, and Pyatt said he had been a part of 36 missions there. Finally came the real question, about the existence of Jack Larsen. Pyatt said he knew Larsen, but he never knew what happened to him.

After realizing so many details from a 2-year-old boy were somehow realistic in nature, Bruce became a man possessed, trying to disprove all of these "coincidences." He began to track down military records from across the nation. His ultimate goal was to disprove these "coincidences" and to end the silly idea, once and for all, that a supposed spirit was affecting his son.

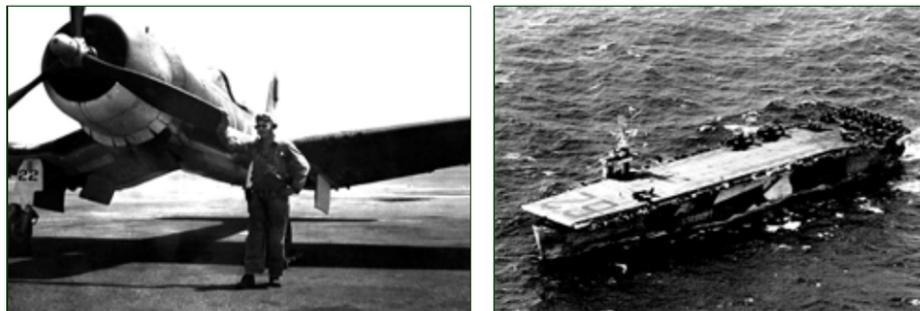
Consequently, he needed to find Jack Larsen.

### **Pieces of the puzzle begin to come together**

Bruce couldn't find anything on a Jack Larsen – anywhere – in military records after his son mentioned the name. He searched every list he could find from the U.S. National Archives on the men who died who were stationed on the Natoma Bay and all carriers during World War II. There were several Larsens and Larsons who had died, but no Jack Larsen of the Natoma Bay. He searched for more than a year, with nothing to show for it. He almost gave up.

The problem was Bruce was looking for a dead man. After attending a Natoma Bay Association Reunion in September of 2002, Bruce found out that Jack Larsen was alive and well in Springdale, Ark.

But the reunion unearthed something far more important to his son's puzzling nightmares. After speaking with veterans from the carrier and their families, never mentioning the motivation of his son's unexplainable behavior, Bruce learned there were 21 men who were lost from the Natoma Bay.



*James Huston Jr. was a fighter pilot in the Pacific Theater during World War II. **Above, left:** Huston poses with his Corsair plane – the same type of aircraft that James Leininger mentioned by name during his earliest nightmares. **Above, right:** The U.S.S. Natoma Bay is the carrier from which Huston flew for some five months before he was shot down. The carrier lost 21 men during its campaign in the Pacific.*

One of those men was a Lt. James McCreedy Huston Jr. from the VC-81 fighter squadron, who was shot down at the age of 21 on a special strike mission against shipping in Futami Ko Harbor at Chichi Jima, according to declassified aircraft action reports. Huston had volunteered for the mission, the last mission he would have flown before returning to the United States. He was the only pilot from the Natoma Bay who was shot down at Chichi Jima.

The name stuck out even more in Bruce's mind because the Leiningers had noticed that James had been signing his name as "James 3" on his crayon drawings of World War II planes. He was even saying he was "James 3" – months before the reunion – implying that perhaps since Huston was named after his father, James Leininger was the third.

At this point, Bruce says he became frustrated because his quest to disprove the possibility that his son was experiencing a past life was going in the wrong direction.

"All he ever draws are planes fighting, and he knows the type of planes. I mean he even draws the red sun for the Japanese," Bruce says. "But after he drew 'James 3' for the first time, I asked him why he did that. James said, 'I'm the third. I'm James 3.' He's been calling himself that ever since he was 3 years old. I think he is struggling with something unresolved or he just wouldn't be still drawing those images, like a needle stuck on a record."

Determined to fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle, Bruce visited Larsen in Arkansas in September of 2002 and asked him about Huston. Larsen said he couldn't remember what happened to Huston, but he was sure his plane had been hit by anti-aircraft fire on March 3, 1945 – the day Huston failed to return from his mission and was then pronounced missing in action. Larsen had been Huston's wingman during the day's run to Chichi Jima.

However, Bruce still had hope that all of this talk about spirits was wrong. After vigorously checking into the squadron's aircraft action records, he found out that Huston was shot down in a FM2 Wildcat fighter plane – not a Corsair – and no one at the reunion mentioned anything about Corsairs taking off from the Natoma Bay. Bruce says this apparent inaccuracy gave him hope that all of this was just a series of coincidences.

Just to make sure, Bruce tried to find members of Huston's family. In February of 2003 he made contact with Anne Huston Barron, Huston's sister, who now lives in Los Gatos, Calif. Through several phone conversations, the Leiningers

and Ms. Barron became friends, and she agreed to send Bruce photos of her brother during his military service. The packages of photos arrived in February and March of 2003.

In one of the packages was a photo of Huston standing in front of a Corsair fighter plane – the same kind of plane James had mentioned over and over. According to Bruce, interviews with past servicemen and declassified U.S. military records, before Huston joined up with the Natoma Bay and VC-81, he was part of an elite special squadron, the VF-301 Devil's Disciples, from January to August of 1944.

The elite squadron test-flew Corsairs for carrier use, and only 20 pilots were selected for this assignment. However, the VF-301 squadron was disbanded after eight months and Huston was then transferred to VC-81 on Oct. 8, 1944.

When he learned this, Bruce says, all of his skepticism vanished.

"I don't have an answer for this, so I can't explain it either," Bruce says. "Through it all, there has to be an element of faith. There could still be the coincidence of dreaming this all up, but there are odd factors you have to calculate. Lightning can strike once, but when it strikes eight or nine times, you can't say it's a coincidence."

Bruce didn't tell Ms. Barron about his son's supernatural story until later that fall, in October of 2003. When he finally told her about the possibility of her brother's spirit being a part of James, she says she was stunned at first and had to let it all sink in. Then on Oct. 15, 2003, Bruce and Andrea received a letter from her, along with several of Huston's personal effects, that not only said she felt James should have the belongings, but that she truly believed the story.

"This child couldn't know the things he does – he just couldn't – so I believe he is somehow a part of my brother," Ms. Barron says. "These are the things you read about. There must be a reason for it, but I have no hint of what it could be. It's some phenomenon that I don't understand. It all happened nearly 60 years ago. There must be a reason."

Despite not knowing the reason for these coincidences, Ms. Barron is convinced that James Leininger is somehow linked to her lost brother. She now calls the 6-year-old boy "James 3." In turn, he refers to Ms. Barron, who is 86 years old, as his sister.

As Bruce would uncover more information about Huston, without telling James about any of it, the Leingers would notice more about their son's actions. James had three G.I. Joe dolls and named them Leon, Walter and Billie – names of three pilots who coincidentally served with Huston.

According to U.S. Pacific Fleet records, Lt. Leon Stevens Conner, Ensign Walter John Devlin and Ensign Billie Rufus Peeler were among the 21 fatalities from the Natoma Bay. They were also members of the VC-81 air squadron with Huston. When asked why he named the dolls the way he did, Bruce says James answered, "Because they greeted me when I went to heaven."

After James said that, Bruce could only leave the room in stunned silence.

James also explained to his father how Corsairs would frequently have flat tires and would always tend to turn to the left. After checking with military historians at the Lone Star Flight Museum in Galveston, Texas, the statement was verified.

Andrea recalls the first time she cooked meatloaf for James, who had never had the meal in his life. After Andrea told him they were having meatloaf for dinner, James said he hadn't had meatloaf since he was on the Natoma Bay. So, Bruce and Andrea contacted several veterans from the carrier, and they learned that meatloaf was a regular meal for the crew.

#### **The day James Huston's plane went down**

After discovering the Corsair connection was real, there was one significant detail from James' dreams that needed to be explained: exactly how the plane was shot down. After another wave of nightmares, Bruce and Andrea recall how James would say his plane was shot in the engine, and he would repeatedly check and make sure fire extinguishers were available and marked wherever they went.

However, none of Huston's wingmen – Jack Larsen, Bob Greenwalt or William Mathson Jr. – from the VC-81 squadron saw his plane shot down on March 3, 1945, mostly because his plane was the last to dive in the strafing run, according to VC-81 military war diaries. Greenwalt, who also served with Huston as a Devil's Disciple, says when the squadron realized that Huston's plane was no longer in the air, their planes took a second run to look for debris. They found nothing. With no eyewitnesses, the Leingers could only "believe" that Huston had been shot down near Futami Ko Harbor at Chichi Jima.

As luck would have it, in June of 2003, another veteran helped Bruce with his research. An Internet posting left by him on the Natoma Bay Association website nearly a year earlier caught the attention of a veteran by the name of Jack Durham. Durham turned out to be a member of the VC-83 torpedo-bomber medium (TBM) squad from the U.S.S. Sargent Bay that had run parallel to Huston's squadron on the day he was shot down. According to U.S.S. Natoma Bay aircraft action reports, the VC-81 squadron covered the TBMs during the Futami Ko Harbor strike. Without a doubt, Durham says, he saw Huston's plane shot down by anti-aircraft fire – a fact confirmed by VC-83 aircraft action reports.

Pulling up more records on the bomber squad and reading their military war diaries, Bruce then contacted other VC-83 crew members – John Richardson, Bob Skelton and Ralph Clabour – and they all confirmed that not only had Huston's plane been shot down, but they saw it get hit in the engine, causing an explosion in the front of the plane. It then crashed into Futami Ko Harbor, the same place James pointed to in the history book with his father in November of 2000.

Every detail of James' dreams have been verified to the Leingers' satisfaction, whether through eyewitness accounts, personal interviews or military records. Bruce and Andrea say they are absolutely convinced that Huston's spirit has touched James. They just can't figure out why or how exactly.

"If a soul reincarnates with 'unfinished business,' or dies a traumatic death, these memories are more likely to carry over into another life," says Ms. Bowman, the author and expert on such metaphysical phenomena. "In James' case, he died a traumatic death as a young man. There was still much emotion and energy that may have propelled these

memories forward. ... As I see it, a part of James Huston's consciousness survived death and is a part of James Leininger's soul consciousness. The present incarnation is not a carbon copy of the last, but contains aspects of James Huston's personality and experience."

James continues to recall his past life memories, even today. But Bowman says children usually lose their abilities to remember past life memories by the age of 7. With time running out, what could be the final piece to the puzzle is the crash site itself, and if the cockpit were jammed shut, it would explain the first nightmares. But due to U.S. military regulations concerning downed aircraft in foreign waters, Bruce says diving on the site and disturbing the remains of the pilot would be prohibited.