

The Gentle American Doctor

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Every time I talk to people who were interviewed by Dr. Stevenson, they always ask the same questions: “Where is the American Doctor? When is he coming back to Lebanon? Is he still doing research on reincarnation?”

Dr. Stevenson had a way of putting children and their parents at ease. He always brought gifts to the children that he interviewed, and his gentle, non-invasive style won their confidence. As a result they told him about many private incidents connected to their previous lives. Some even consulted him on medical issues! Whenever we returned to a house for a follow-up interview, Dr. Stevenson was always welcomed heartily.

I first met Dr. Ian Stevenson in 1976, having just graduated from the American University of Beirut (AUB) with a Business Administration degree. Dr. Sami Makarem, a professor at AUB, asked me if I would be interested to work with Dr. Stevenson, who was working on cases of reincarnation in Lebanon and elsewhere. I started as an interpreter and then became his research assistant. My duties were to conduct and translate field interviews from Arabic to English, prepare reports, and research new cases for him. It was through him that I met Dr. Emily Williams Kelly, who also came to Lebanon to investigate and follow up on Dr. Stevenson’s cases.

In the summer of 1980, Dr. Stevenson asked me to come to Charlottesville to assist him in organizing data for his research work at the University of Virginia. I worked on assigning computer codes to selected Lebanese cases on reincarnation.

In 1997, after an absence from Lebanon of 16 years, Dr. Stevenson asked me to assist him again in his research on reincarnation in Lebanon. He arrived in the company of Tom Shroder, an award-winning journalist and later the author of *Old Souls* (Shroder, 1999). During that memorable visit, I arranged for Dr. Stevenson to deliver a presentation and lead a discussion on reincarnation at AUB. The hall was full, and everyone commented on his vast knowledge and dignity.

It was also through Dr. Stevenson that I met Dr. Erlendur Haraldsson, who was interested in conducting psychological tests and research on Lebanese children who remember previous lives. It was thus that I became a co-author with Dr. Haraldsson of a paper on three cases of reincarnation in Lebanon (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzeddin, 2004).

Dr. Stevenson was a patient man. He would wait for me to translate, in

particular after long, and sometimes emotional, responses from his subjects. Dr. Stevenson was also a meticulous person. We carried all kinds of forms with us on our trips, including “preliminary information forms about reincarnation cases,” “birthmarks forms,” “follow-up interviews,” and our daily expense record forms.

I always received autographed copies of his new published books. On January 23, 2001, he sent me his book *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, with this note: “For Majd with thanks for all your excellent help over many years and love, from Ian Stevenson.”

What would one of Dr. Stevenson’s subjects say about him today? To find out I visited Itidal Abul-Hisn, who as a child remembered a previous life (see Stevenson, 1997: vol. 2, p. 1900). She is one of many cases of the reincarnation type that Dr. Stevenson had investigated in Lebanon. She still lives in the same apartment in Beirut where Dr. Stevenson, Tom Shroder, and I had a follow-up interview with her in 1997. She was moved by the news of his death and said:

Dr. Stevenson had good manners. He always asked me how I was doing. If I got uneasy while I was speaking about my previous life, he would stop and ask me if I want to rest for a while before I continue. He would also ask me if I want to continue talking, stop or change the subject. All his questions were asked politely and nicely. He always thanked us for the time we gave him.

Itidal was silent for awhile, and then with a smile said:

I remember when Dr. Stevenson came to interview me for the second time. He gave me a strawberry-fragranced cologne bottle. I still remember that bottle. He also gave my mother a pistachio-colored scarf. Dr. Stevenson visited us four times. I am really sorry that he passed away.

In a note to Dr. Stevenson’s friends and family, I wrote that, for the Druze, reincarnation is more than a field of study, it is a firm belief. With that belief it becomes a little easier to accept the death of those we love. It does not, however, diminish the sense of loss.

References

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