

The Policeman And The Painter

— Case 19 —

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. 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

This case was included in *The Survival Files*¹ and again in *Defending Bridey's Honor* in 2013. The main text of the former book is formatted as a dialogue between its author and a mentor known only as "the old man." The following is part of their conversation after the case has been read.

"Consider the three possible outcomes of Captain Snow's search for the painting," he suggested, as the sky darkened and the wind began to deliver the rain it had promised since breakfast. "First, it could have been displayed or reproduced in a public venue or document. Second, it could not have existed at all except in Snow's imagination. And, third, it could be real but beyond his access. How do you think each possibility would affect the case?"

"If Snow had found that the painting had been reproduced in a time and place where he could have seen it," I said, "he would have assumed that he had simply forgotten that viewing until his subconscious mind offered it up during hypnosis. In which case, he would never have investigated further and found the other 28 correspondences, and there would be no case."

"If Snow had never found the painting, because it didn't exist or had been destroyed or remained in a private collection, he would never have uncovered Beckwith's name, and sooner or later he would have stopped looking. Again, no case."

"It would appear, then," he summarized, "that Snow's rather inexplicable obsession with finding the painting had to be combined with his wife's sudden desire to visit New Orleans and the

gallery's recent purchase and prominent display of the painting, or we would have no story."

"Before moving on," I said, "there is another thing that strikes me as especially evidential in the Beckwith case. The one piece of evidence that Snow got wrong was Mrs. Beckwith's name, yet that surely would be part of the public record, no matter how scanty that record might be. This is a pretty strong indication that Snow's source was indeed the regression, rather than any prior experience or research."

"Good point," he said, moving to close the windows across the back, where the rain was coming in. "And it brings to mind an interesting footnote to the case. Snow, while in trance and speaking as Beckwith, said that he was in a city and meeting a woman named Amanda. After his book was published, Snow reports, research by a librarian revealed that the young Beckwith dated a girl named Amanda, who moved to New York City at about the same time Beckwith did.² So, it wasn't that Snow got the name of Beckwith's wife wrong, it was just that he incorrectly assumed that the girl Amanda must have been his wife."

"As with so many of these cases, the deeper one looks, the more convincing they become."

For Further Information

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



Copyright 2008, 2013 Miles Edward Allen

[A Survival-Top-40 Case](#)

¹ Allen, Miles, *The Survival Files*, Momentpoint Media, 2007.

² Information from Capt. Snow in correspondence with the author, 27 October, 2005.