

Can you really know yourself through a \$34 vacation in your

Past lives?

I looked down at my feet and saw a pair of old-fashioned, ankle-high button-up boots on feet smaller than my own. The world of Victorian England opened up around me. I was eight years old, living in a house with a high ceiling, with parents, sisters and servants. I was standing in front of a table full of baked treats and a stately tea service. I picked up a pastry and bit into it.

Only a few moments before I had been in Eugene, years away from 19th-century England.

To have been or not to have been, that is the question.

Reincarnation — a concept debated by everyone from theologians to housewives and construction workers — is one of the ways human beings have believed they can elude the grim reaper.

Others use the past-life concept to learn about themselves. One's prior existences can give insight to the successes or failures of this one, says Laeh Varada Garfield, who has been a professional psychic for 14 years.

One of Garfield's services is guiding her clients back to their past lives and counseling the clients on their discoveries. The time voyagers pay from \$34 to \$50 for the sessions, depending on the length of the session and the number of people involved.

"We have memory further than this lifetime," Garfield says. "We are just schooled to forget it."

"Past lives are novels of human life."

The byword of reincarnation is learning, says Garfield. Humans come from the "other side" to learn. They die, yet return to earth to learn even more. She says people learn human foibles, such as arrogance and hate, on earth.

"We get distracted. So much of the lesson is to learn to be one-pointed with our minds. It is only when we learn to be one-pointed that we can achieve perfect union with God."

Sometimes an individual will learn nothing from a particular life. "If you refuse to grow while you are here, you will get a re-run," Garfield says.

When does one reach the end of the line? Garfield says it's up to the passenger. A "discarnate" has the choice to be reborn or stay put on the other side, but most discarnates choose to enjoy earthly pleasures again, she says.

Recently Garfield conducted a "past lives seminar" where she led five customers through two of their past lives. The audience included a University profes-

sor, a married couple, Garfield's apprentice and an Emerald reporter.

Garfield had everyone lie on their backs on a mat with knees bent and arms at their sides. "Imagine yourself being rooted into the bedrock of the earth," she instructed. "Now bring in green energy through your feet, up to the small of your back, up your spine and out the top of your head."

After a few minutes of relaxation, everybody was in a trance. Garfield guided the group to the "Akashic records, where information about human beings is kept."

Uio, an archangel, is the keeper of the records, she explained. He welcomes and leads the seeker to his past-life file.

Each file contains scrolls, the records of past lives. The searcher unrolls a scroll to begin one of his life stories.

The procedure may sound farfetched to some, but others feel it is no more bizarre than Christian doctrine. In fact, says Garfield, only the Christian and

Jewish faiths discount reincarnation.

Why do they find it so difficult to digest?

"Because Christians call it a competitor inspired by Satan," says Ray Hyman, University professor and one of the country's leading parapsychologists, investigators of psychic phenomenon.

Although unconvinced by religious arguments against reincarnation, Hyman says there are secular reasons for being skeptical of seminars like Garfield's.

He surmises that a past-life experience is drawn not from the Akashic records, but from a person's "unbelievably creative" mind.

But such reasons are pipe dreams compared to the two nightmares that Hyman says such seminars can become.

Delving into a person's mind may uncover painful neuroses, says Hyman. He feels the past-life therapist usually doesn't have the long-term relationship with the client that is necessary to soothe a shaky psyche.

Hyman's second fear is that those who accept the therapy without question may be manipulated.

"I'm not sure it's really good in the long run for people to believe without skepticism," Hyman says.

As a matter of fact, some of the therapists are skeptics themselves, he says. "I suspect some of them believe this, I don't think a lot of them do."

The debate goes on. But in the midst of all the chatter, Hyman feels the big point is overlooked.

"What's sad about these cases is as soon as you show they have no occult basis, people drop it. But it's still fascinating that people can create these things."

I married a banker's son when I was 19. I'm not sure why I did. I think my parents forced me to. The marriage didn't work out very well.

By the time I was 29, I felt radical. I met an American woman named Julia at the theater in London. She was quite an independent soul who seemed to have fun. What intrigued me was her cigarette smoking habit. Cigarette smoking was not something a Victorian lady did and got away with. So I asked her for a smoke. My family never forgave me.

Scarlet fever killed me in 1929. I had hoped to teach my two daughters to be independent. Unfortunately they resented my outlandish behavior because it prevented them from finding prominent places in English society. Who knows what happened to them?

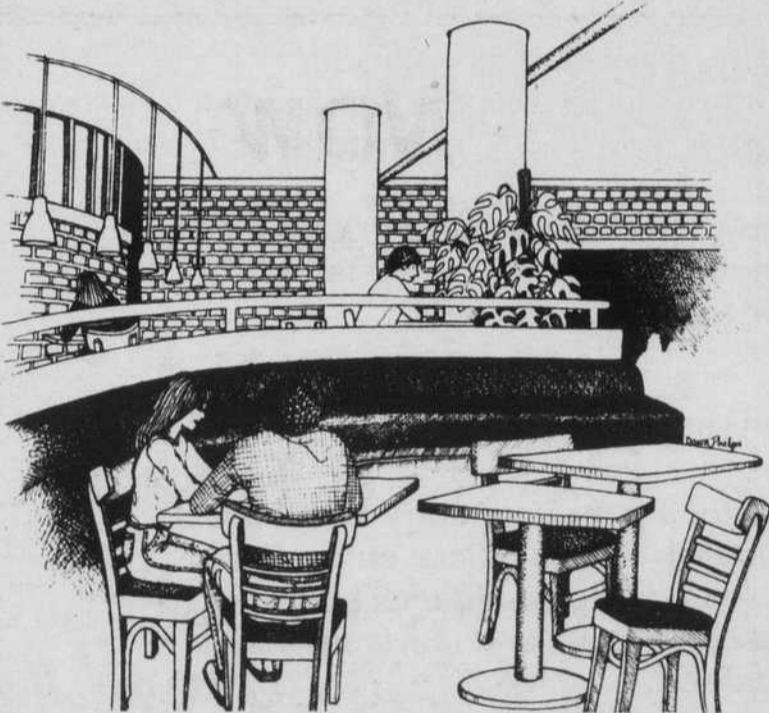


Photo courtesy of Hanafi Russell

Laeh Garfield

Story by Caroline Petrich and Jody Murray

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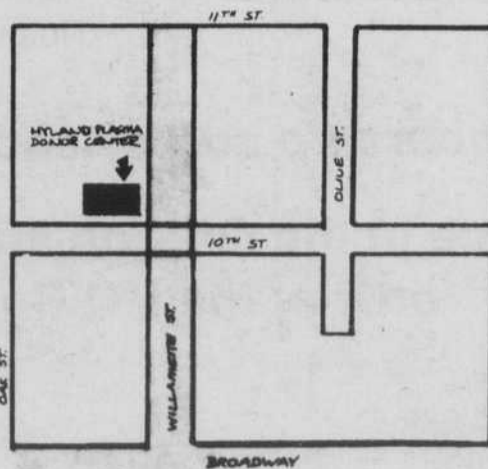
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