

# Ian Stevenson's Rabih Elawar at 60: Past-Life Memory Loss and Retention in Adulthood<sup>1</sup>

James G. Matlock

Parapsychology Foundation

Khattar Hatoum

Center of Reincarnation and Evolution

Carole Louie

**Abstract.** *Objective:* We wanted to assess how well a Lebanese Druze man, Rabih Elawar, now living in Richmond, Virginia, retained the past-life memories studied by Ian Stevenson when he was a child in Lebanon. *Methods:* Over a series of interviews, we first asked Rabih to relate all he recalled about the previous life, then presented Stevenson's report, which he had not previously read, to get his responses to items he had not mentioned spontaneously. *Results:* Statements Stevenson recorded in his published report and unpublished field notes and memories Rabih recounted to us are highly consistent, although Rabih recalled some events differently and related details Stevenson apparently did not hear about. When we presented the items recorded by Stevenson but not mentioned spontaneously by him, Rabih was prompted to recall these also and clarified points on which there was apparent disagreement. *Conclusions:* Rabih's recall of the previous life at 58–60 is superior to what has been reported for past-life memory retention among other Lebanese Druze adults or with Sri Lankan, Indian, Brazilian, and American adults. This may be related to Rabih's recalling a life in the same village and same extended family that, moreover, ended only a short while (6 months) before his birth, providing plentiful cues to recall from early in his life. Our findings are consistent with those regarding present-life memory retention and loss, supporting the view that the foundations of past-life memory are closely similar to those of present-life memory.

**Keywords:** memory loss and retention, memory reliability, observational research, past-life memory, reincarnation case studies, CORT

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<sup>1</sup> Address correspondence to James G. Matlock, Ph.D., Parapsychology Foundation, PO Box 1562, New York, NY, 10021. Email: [jgmatlock@yahoo.com](mailto:jgmatlock@yahoo.com). The authors thank Rabih Elawar for sharing his memories and acknowledge the participation of Anja Brightly and Leila Kazzie in the early stages of the study. Jim B. Tucker gave the permission to consult Ian's Stevenson's Rabih Elawar case file at the Division of Perceptual Studies, Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, University of Virginia School of Medicine.



## Highlights

- We interviewed Rabih Elawar at 58–60 years of age, more than 50 years after the investigation of his childhood past-life memories by Ian Stevenson.
- We found that he remembered all the major incidents Stevenson recorded, sometimes adding new details to them.
- Rabih’s memories may have remained strong because he recalled having lived before in the same village, dying only six months before his birth, which would have furnished many cues to recall.
- The new items Rabih recalled may not reflect new memories, but rather memories not recorded by Stevenson.
- Rabih’s past-life memory retention is similar to what has been observed with present-life memory retention, suggesting that present- and past-life memory have similar cognitive foundations.

From his decades of research on past-life memory, Ian Stevenson concluded that, “children nearly always stop talking about the previous lives between the ages of five and eight, but some stop earlier and others later. A few subjects claim to preserve their memories into adulthood, and a few others pretend to have forgotten everything, although they apparently still remember much” (Stevenson, 2001, p. 108). The impression that past-life memory retention into adulthood is unusual persisted until follow-up studies by Erlendur Haraldsson in Sri Lanka (Haraldsson, 2008) and Lebanon (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2012).

In Sri Lanka, Haraldsson (2008) discovered that 16 of 42 individuals (38%) still remembered some things about the previous life, and among the Lebanese Druze (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2012), 24 of 28 (86%) did so. Mills (2008) found the same with 16 (52%) of 31 follow-up Indian participants. More recently, Eric Pires (Ávila Pires, 2024) learned that 6 (33%) of 18 Brazilians whose childhood past-life memories had been studied by Hernani Andrade remembered some things many years later. In follow-up studies of American experiencers by Marieta Pehlivanova and colleagues (Pehlivanova et al., 2024), 11 (48%) of 23 respondents reported retaining some past-life memories from childhood into adulthood.

The issue of loss and retention of past-life memories is more complex than the persistence of memories into adulthood, however. It would seem that if past-life memories are retained past the early teen years, some will last for life, but much that is recalled in childhood is lost in later years. Sri Lankans recalled a mean of 29.25 items in childhood, but 6.56 in adulthood (Haraldsson, 2008). Lebanese Druze recalled a mean of 29.76 items in childhood, but 8.76 in adulthood (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2012). Brazilians recalled a mean of 33 items in childhood, but 11.3 in adulthood (Ávila Pires, 2024). Moreover, only about half of the memories reported in the follow-ups of Haraldsson and Abu-Izzedin (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2012) and Pires (Ávila Pires, 2024) matched those recorded when the participants were children, “raising the question of false and distorted memories” in adulthood (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2012, p. 985).

Haraldsson (2008), Haraldsson and Abu-Izzedin (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzedin, 2012), Pires (Ávila Pires, 2024), and Pehlivanova et al. (2024) analyzed patterns across groups. Here, we report a follow-up study of a single individual, Rabih (pronounced RaBEEah) Elawar, whose case Stevenson investigated between 1969 and 1978 and reported in the third volume of his *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* series (Stevenson, 1980). Rabih emigrated from Lebanon in 2000 and since November 2003 has resided in a suburb of Richmond, Virginia, where we interviewed him on six occasions between August 2022 and October 2024. Rabih was 58–60 at this time but claimed still to have clear memories of the previous life he had spoken about as a child. In fact, he turned out to be exceptional in his past-life memory retention, spontaneously reporting 17 (43.5%) of the 39 statements Stevenson recorded for him at ages 5–6 and claiming to recall another 21 (53.9%) when they were read to him.

This paper focuses on factors related to Rabih’s past-life memory retention and loss. A companion paper (Matlock et al., in press) treats the behavioral dimensions of the case, including personality changes in Rabih as he matured. A timeline of events related to the case and its investigation is presented in Table 1.

Matlock (2019) drew attention to parallels between past-life and present-life memory, suggesting that they share a cognitive foundation. In our Discussion, we comment on how research with present-life memory retention sheds light on Rabih’s past-life memory retention.

**Table 1***Events in the Development and Investigation of the Case of Rabih Elawar*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
May 1946	Chowki Asaad Sabra Elawar (Al-Aawar) born in Portuguese Guinea.
July 29, 1963	Chowki fatally injured in accident at Deir El Harf, Lebanon; dies in hospital.
February 1, 1964	Rabih Amin Ali Elawar (Al-Aawar) born in Qornayel, Lebanon.
August 1968	Rabih's leads way to Chowki's house, enters, meets people there.
Autumn 1968	Rabih first speaks with Chowki's cousin Hisham Elawar about accident.
Feb 23, 1969	IS's first interviews with Rabih's parents in Qornayel.
March 1, 1969	IS interviews Chowki's uncle Yusuf Sabra Elawar at gas station in Qornayel.
July 1969	IS interviews Chowki's cousin Hisham Elawar and Chowki's mother in Beirut.
March 30, 1970	IS interviews Rabih's cousin Hamad Elawar, Qornayel.
March 31, 1970	IS interviews Rabih's grandmother Latife Elawar in Qornayel.
March 31, 1970	IS interviews Hisham Elawar and other members of Chowki's family in Beirut.
April 1, 1970	IS receives phone call from Chowki's elder brother, Mohammed Sabra Elawar.
April 2, 1970	IS consults with Hisham Elawar by telephone.
March 5, 1971	IS examines records of accident at police station at Ras el-Matn.
March 1, 1972	IS's second interview with Rabih's parents and first interview with Rabih, in Qornayel.
March 11, 1972	IS interviews Rabih's elder brother Walid in Qornayel.
August 17, 1972	IS's interpreter Wadih Rabbath goes to Qornayel to ask follow-up questions; reports to IS in letter of August 25, 1972.
December 1974-February 1975	IS correspondence with Wadih Rabbath over details of testimony.
	Rabih meets driver of truck involved in accident that killed Chowki.
March 3, 1978	IS's third interview with Rabih's parents, second with Rabih.

June-August 1978	IS exchanges letters with Hisham Elawar.
1980	Publication of IS's report of Rabih's case.
June 2000	Rabih emigrates from Lebanon to the United States.
Sept 19, 2000	From Raleigh, North Carolina, Rabih sends word he would like to be in touch with IS; they speak briefly by telephone, but never meet.
November 2003	Rabih settles in Henrico, a suburb of Richmond, Virginia.
August 20, 2022	CL meets AB at Richmond, Virginia, IONS meeting.
August 26, 2022	CL's first meeting and interview with Rabih at his Lebanese Bakery in Henrico, along with AB and LK.
November 2022	CL meets KH.
July 6, 2023	Second interview with Rabih with AB, CL, and KH (in-person) and JM (via Zoom).
May 8, 2024	CL, KH, and JM meet in person to discuss case.
June 10 2024	Third interview of Rabih, by CL, KH, and JM.
July 9, 2024	Fourth interview of Rabih, by CL, KH, and JM (in person).
July 22, 2024	CL, KH, and JM meet without Rabih.
August 21, 2024	Fifth interview of Rabih, by CL, KH, and JM, with EP.
September 12, 2024	CL, KH and JM meet in Henrico to discuss investigation Symposium preparations.
September 18, 2024	Meeting with CL, KH (in-person), and JM (online).
October 17, 2024	CL, KH, and JM meet in Henrico to discuss investigation Symposium preparations.
October 23, 2024	Sixth interview with Rabih with AB, CL, and KH (in-person) and JM (on Zoom). KH reads Rabih statements Stevenson attributed to him when he was a child.

Note: AB = Anja Brightly, EP = Eric Pires, IS = Ian Stevenson, JM = James Matlock, KH = Khattar Hattoum, LK = Leila Kazzie, CL = Carole Louie.

## Stevenson's Investigation, 1969–1978

The following description of Stevenson's investigation draws on his unpublished field notes preserved at the University of Virginia, along with his published report of Rabih's case (Stevenson, 1980). Stevenson first heard about Rabih's past-life memory claims in February 1969 when he was in Qornayel, Lebanon, studying other cases. Rabih had led the way to the house in which he remembered having lived, not far from his own home, about six months prior, and Stevenson lost no time starting his investigation. Rabih had just turned 5 when Stevenson spoke with his parents on February 23, 1969. A week later, Stevenson talked to the father of the young man—Chowki (pronounced SHAUkee) Asaad Sabra Elawar, a distant relative—with whom Rabih identified. On the latter occasion, Stevenson inspected Chowki's house, which figured large in Rabih's memories. When he returned to Lebanon in July 1969, Stevenson met four other witnesses, including Chowki's mother, in Beirut. At the end of March 1970, he conducted additional interviews in Qornayel. In March 1972, he consulted documents at a police precinct in Ras el-Matn, close to where Chowki suffered fatal injuries when the Vespa motor scooter he was driving collided with a truck. Stevenson had a second interview with Rabih's parents in March 1972, when he spoke with Rabih for the first time. Stevenson conducted a third interview with Rabih's parents and a second with Rabih in March 1978.

Stevenson's investigation included telephone calls and correspondence, as well as in-person interviews. Additionally, he tasked his main interpreter, Wadih Rabbath, with follow-up interviews on his behalf. Altogether, Stevenson spoke with or heard from 12 witnesses, some repeatedly, over the nine years he spent on the case. A detailed summary of Stevenson's activities appears in Table 1. Rabih's family and other witnesses on his side spoke only Arabic and required the intermediary of French-speaking Rabbath. All the principal witnesses on Chowki's side were fluent in either English or French, so required no interpreter for Canadian-born Stevenson. One important witness, Chowki's cousin Hisham Elawar, whom Stevenson interviewed in person, also corresponded with him after his return to Charlottesville.

## Our Follow-Up Study, 2022–2024

Rabih immigrated to the United States in June 2000 and, after moving around for a while, settled in Henrico, Virginia (a suburb of Richmond), at the end of 2002. There he opened a succession of businesses, including Richmond Area Renovations (a home improvement concern) and a Lebanese bakery and restaurant. He sold his

bakery and restaurant in 2022 but retains his construction enterprise. Rabih spells his surname Al-Aawar and gives his full name as Rabih Amin Ali Al-Aawar, indicating that he is the son of Amin Ali Al-Aawar. We have elected to retain the French-inspired spelling of the surname (Elawar) Stevenson employed in his publications, as his case has become known under this variation.

We became acquainted with Rabih after Carole Louie (CL) heard about a Lebanese Druze man who recalled an earlier life. CL arranged to meet Rabih at his Lebanese bakery, along with Anja Brightly (AB) and Leila Kazzie (LK), in August 2022 (see Table 1). CL audio-taped this initial meeting with Rabih. A few months later CL met psychologist Khattar Hatoum (KH), a Lebanese Druze, and old friend of Rabih. When CL realized that KH was acquainted with Rabih, she reached out to him. CL also contacted James Matlock (JM), with whom she was acquainted on Facebook.

CL organized a meeting in July 2023 with KH, AB, and Rabih in person, with JM included over a Zoom connection. In this meeting, we agreed that Rabih's persisting memories provided an opportunity to study childhood past-life memory retention. Various factors prevented us from proceeding until May 2024, when JM visited Henrico. This second meeting gave us the opportunity to chart our way forward, although Rabih, unfortunately, was unable to attend. Our subsequent meetings with Rabih are listed in Table 1.

We spoke to Rabih in English, with KH interpreting in Arabic occasionally as required. CL recorded all meetings, those with and without Rabih, and generated transcripts of them. JM consulted Rabih's file at the University of Virginia, to supplement his published report (Stevenson, 1980). Rabih told us that he had never read the latter. Although Stevenson sent him an autographed copy of his book, Rabih's English was then very poor and he lent the volume to an acquaintance who never returned it. This provided the opportunity for us to present Stevenson's report to Rabih for the first time in October 2024.

JM dissected Rabih's testimony into a series of discrete statements to compare with the statements credited to him by Stevenson, noting which Rabih had related spontaneously and which were elicited in response to Stevenson's report. Rabih's memories of Chowki (both those collected by Stevenson and reported spontaneously to us) turned out to cluster around a series of episodes, which we describe next. Following this, we compare what Rabih told us to what Stevenson reported in a more systematic way, with the aid of a table and statistical analysis.

## Rabih's Memories of Chowki Over Time

Chowki Asaad Sabra Elawar was born in Portuguese Guinea, now the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, in May 1946. His father was a businessman engaged in trade with Africa. His parents lived in Africa for many years but Chowki was sent back to Lebanon to live with relatives when he was three years old. He grew up in Qornayel and attended school in Lebanon. His family was wealthy, possessing a large residence in Qornayel and a second in Beirut. Chowki was fond of motorbikes, but because of his somewhat impulsive nature his family refrained from purchasing one for him. His cousin Hisham was given a Vespa motorized scooter, however, and Chowki was driving this one day in July 1963 with Hisham as passenger, when he rounded a curve at high speed and collided with a truck. Badly injured in the accident, Chowki was carried to a hospital, where he died a few hours later. He was only 17 at the time (Stevenson, 1980, pp. 121–122). Rabih was born six months later, on February 1, 1964, in Qornayel, to a different branch of the Elawar family. His modest house stood further up a tall hill from Chowki's large house, which could not be seen from its vantage. However, Chowki's house was in sight of the residence of Rabih's maternal grandparents, where he spent a good deal of time in his early years (Stevenson, 1980, pp. 117, 119–120).

## Rabih's Statements and Recognitions Recorded by Stevenson, 1969–1978

### *Earliest Memories*

Stevenson says that Rabih started speaking late, at about 30 months. He began to refer to a previous life at 36 months. According to his mother, his first allusion to that life occurred at a school for small children that he attended. A teacher called him "Rabih," but he would not respond to this name, insisting that he was "Chowki." Later, at about 3½ years, Rabih began to ask his parents to take him to "my family." He said that "his" family lived further down the hill on which Qornayel is built, specifying that their house was close to a hotel. Once, after being bathed, he insisted on getting dressed again to visit his other family. This was the family of "Uncle Sabra," but given that Druze children are taught to refer to all male elders as "uncle," and "Sabra" occurs commonly among the Druze, the name was non-specific, and his parents did not understand which family he intended.

### *First Visit to Sabra Elawar House*

According to Stevenson, Rabih continued to ask to go to the Sabra Elawar house, but his parents did not know where this was. Nonetheless,

His demands to go to the house were so strong that eventually his parents let him go along the road in the direction he wanted to take, accompanied by his older brother Walid and a cousin, Hamad. Rabih went to the house of Asaad Sabra Elawar, which is located in [Qornayel] about 1.8 kilometers from his family's home. Having reached the house, Rabih boldly entered and found some members of the Sabra Elawar family assembled inside. They asked who he was, and he said: "I am Chowki." He then recognized several members of the family, much to their astonishment, for they had never seen the child before. They took him around the house, and he recognized various places in it that had been familiar to a son, Chowki, of the Sabra Elawar family. (Stevenson, 1980, pp. 117–118)

Item 26 in Table 6 of Stevenson (1980, p. 130) is the recognition of Chowki's mother. Stevenson supplies the following gloss:

This recognition occurred on the occasion of Rabih's first visit to the Sabra Elawar house, when he walked in by himself. Several members of the family were in the living room of the house. According to Mohammed Sabra Elawar, when Rabih entered, he went spontaneously and sat on the lap of Adeel Sabra Elawar [Chowki's mother]. He was asked: "Who is she?" and replied: "Adeel. She is my mother."

Adeel Sabra Elawar said Rabih had told her: "You are my mother," but had not given her name. (Stevenson, 1980, p. 130)

Stevenson credits Rabih with having recognized Chowki's brother Mohammed and several other family members on this first visit to the house. After the recognitions, Rabih was asked to show the way to Chowki's room, which he did, although it was one of multiple possible rooms. He also recognized "a statue of President Nassar of Egypt that had been kept in the attic of the Sabra Elawar house" (Stevenson, 1980, p. 133). Stevenson's gloss reads:

According to Mohammed Sabra Elawar (in 1969), Rabih started to go to the attic of the house. Mohammed Sabra Elawar asked: "Where are you going?" Rabih said: "I want to get Abdel Nasser." He then went directly to the attic

and to the place where the statue was. Mohammed followed him up to the attic.

In 1970 Mohammed Sabra Elawar modified somewhat his earlier testimony. He was no longer positive that Rabih had mentioned the statue of Nasser *before* he went to the attic, although he did not deny that he might have done so. . .

Probably Chowki himself had put the statue in the attic, but it is possible that the maid had put it there. In either case, the family members had no conscious recollection that it was there. Mohammed Sabra Elawar recalled that about two years before his death, Chowki had referred to the statue and had said that it had been damaged. (Stevenson, 1980, pp. 133–134; italics in original)

### **Salem Stealing Pears**

The final item in Stevenson’s Table 6 (Item 56) is the “recognition of young man who had tried to steal pears from the Sabra Elawar orchard” (Stevenson, 1980, p. 144).

A young man of the community who had heard about Rabih’s memories of the previous life met him on the road one day. . . The man said to Rabih: “Well, Rabih, are you going to shoot at me again?” To this Rabih replied: “How about you? Are you still going to steal pears?” The man in question confirmed the appropriateness of Rabih’s riposte. I learned about the events related to these remarks from the Sabra Elawar family. The youth in question had tried to steal pears from the garden of the Sabra Elawar house. . . Adeel Sabra Elawar was sure that Chowki had been the one who fired on the thief. (Stevenson, 1980, pp. 144–145)

### **Uncle Yusuf’s Gas Station**

Stevenson (1980, pp. 126–127; Items 14–17) relates that Chowki’s father’s brother Yusuf (whom Rabih called by his nickname, Abu Tariq, Tariq’s father) owned a gasoline station. Stevenson’s item 16 reads, “Once the filter of the gas pump was plugged; he went with his uncle [“Abu Tariq”] to Beirut, and they fixed the pump.” Stevenson counts this memory claim as unverified, because, he says, Yusuf recalled taking Chowki to

Beirut on several occasions, but not specifically the time they went “in connection with a broken pump,” although he considered it “quite possible” that he had done this. In Item 17, Stevenson credits Rabih with having said that the pump in question was white and blue.

### ***Recognition of Hisham***

Stevenson records Rabih’s recognition of Hisham (Stevenson, 1980, p. 141; Item 49), based on testimony from Rabih’s mother. There is no confirmation from Hisham.

Once Hisham passed by Rabih’s house when Rabih was outside the house. Hisham said “Hello,” but nothing more, because he did not place Rabih as a child known to him. Rabih became angry and said in his mother’s hearing: “Once we were friends. Now he does not stop to talk to me.”

Rabih had also seen Hisham on an occasion earlier than this. He had come into his house and told his mother that Hisham had passed by, and he (Rabih) wanted to go and see him. (Stevenson, 1980, p. 141)

### ***Chowki’s Death***

Stevenson’s witnesses for Rabih’s talk about Chowki’s fatal accident were Rabih’s mother, Chowki’s parents, and Chowki’s brother Mohammed. Confirmations of the accuracy of Rabih’s statements (Stevenson, 1980, pp. 128–129; Items 19–24) came from Hisham and a report filed with the police station in Ras el-Matn, which had jurisdiction over Deir Al Harf (Stevenson, 1980, p. 122).

Although Stevenson consistently calls the vehicle Rabih was driving a “motorcycle,” he clearly understood that it was a Vespa motorized scooter (1980, pp. 150, 157). He notes that Rabih identified a Vespa he saw as the type of vehicle involved (1980, p. 150). Rabih was afraid of motorcycles and trucks, generalized to cars, per his mother (Stevenson, 1980, pp. 150–151). The only detail about which Rabih was mistaken was that the truck was stopped and unloading, rather than moving, as Stevenson learned from Hisham and the police report (1980, p. 129; Item 23). Stevenson does not specify the type of truck hit or into what it was unloading. He notes that Chowki and Hisham were taken to a hospital, where Chowki died (1980, p. 122), but does not say where this hospital was located, or describe Chowki’s last moments.

## ***Encountering the Truck Driver***

Rabih told Stevenson about his encounter with the truck driver during his follow-up visit in 1978. Stevenson's account refers solely to Rabih; he evidently never sought to interview the truck driver for his perspective.

Rabih mentioned that a year before this interview he had met the driver of the truck with which Chowki had fatally collided on July 29, 1963. He recognized this man by his face and afterwards learned his name (normally). Rabih spoke with the truck driver about the accident and said that he was the person fatally injured in it. The truck driver received the information with skepticism and asked Rabih to recount the details of the accident. Rabih said that he had done this to the man's satisfaction. (Stevenson, 1974, p. 158).

## ***Rabih's Memories Related to Us, 2022–24***

In telling and retelling his story to us, Rabih never contradicted himself in any important fashion, although he sometimes shared different details. AB and LK participated in our first interview with Rabih, in August 2022. AB participated in our second interview in July 2023, but neither she nor LK were involved in the project thereafter. For convenience of exposition, we have merged Rabih's testimony across our interviews to produce the following narrative, which Rabih has reviewed for accuracy. To facilitate comparison with Stevenson's account, we have organized it under the same headings.

### ***Earliest Memories***

Rabih told us that when he started to walk, at about 18 months, it felt "like something broke," and he began to hear buzzing sounds pressing on his mind "24/7." Gradually these noises became clearer and were replaced by imaged memories. When he started talking, he would describe his previous mother as a large, heavy woman, unlike his present mother, who was slender. He recalls that, with his first words, he asked to return to his mother "with the big butt." He repeatedly demanded to be taken back to the family he remembered, which he called "Sabra," but his parents did not make the connection with their distant relatives in Qornayel (the Asaad Sabra family) and made no effort to verify his memory claims.

### ***First Visit to Sabra Elawar House***

Rabih remembers that when he was about 4 years old, his mother, in an effort to distract him from his incessant crying for the parents and home he recalled, asked his elder brother, Walid, and a cousin, Hamad, to take him to a store to purchase candy. The shop to which they were headed was downhill from his home, in the direction of the Sabra Elawar house. Along the way, Rabih told the other boys he could find his former home and started walking ahead of them. His hair went up when he saw the black gate to the house's compound and he began to run, getting 30 meters (100 feet) or more ahead of his companions. The gate was open and he ran up the steps into the house, where he found Chowki's mother seated cross-legged on the floor, mashing potatoes. Rabih approached her and announced, "Mom, I'm your son, Chowki," whereupon she passed out.

Hearing noises, Chowki's brother Mohammed entered from an interior room. He asked Rabih who he was, and Rabih replied, "I'm your brother. Have you forgotten me?" Rabih's brother and cousin appeared, and Walid told Mohammed that from birth Rabih had been a difficult child. Ever since he had begun to talk, he had said he wanted to return to his previous family. To test him, Mohammed asked Rabih to take him to his old room, which Rabih did.

Rabih reminded Mohammed of a statue of Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, dear to Mohammed, which he said he (Chowki) had hidden in an attic room "near the chair behind the water cooler [cistern]." Chowki's cousin and best friend Hisham had been with him at the time. Chowki had engraved the stone statue with a swastika, to tease Mohammed. "He's going to kill us if he sees that," Hisham had said, and they had decided to hide the mutilated statue in the attic. Rabih led the way to the attic and retrieved the artifact. "Oh my God," responded Mohammed, hugging Rabih. Meanwhile, Chowki's mother had been revived with a drink of water. She too hugged Rabih, who told her, "I miss you. I've been looking for you."

### ***Salem Stealing Pears***

Rabih recalled that Salem was working abroad when he began talking about Chowki, but when Salem returned to Qornayel, he visited Rabih, wanting to test Rabih's memory for himself. They met when Rabih was about 3. Salem asked Rabih if he were Rabih. "No, I'm Chowki," Rabih told him. He would become angry when called Rabih, wanting to be called Chowki. "Are you going to shoot me again with a BB gun?" Salem asked. "Are you going to steal pears again?" Rabih responded.

Rabih told us details about this incident that Stevenson apparently did not hear. He said that at the time, Chowki was alone in his house, shooting small birds in the courtyard with a BB gun, when he saw Salem enter the courtyard and pull pears from a tree, gathering them in his up-turned shirt. Chowki shot him on his belt, at which Salem bolted, dropping the pears. Rabih thought that only Chowki and Salem had known about this incident, which had occurred shortly before Chowki's death.

### ***Uncle Yusuf's Gas Station***

Rabih stated that Chowki's father's brother, Yusuf Sabra Elawar, was the proprietor of a gasoline station in Qornayel. Rabih recalled that on one occasion Chowki had accompanied Yusuf to Beirut to purchase a new nozzle for the gas pump. Rabih recounted that he recalled this incident one day when Yusuf happened to visit his (Rabih's) father. Rabih told his father what he recalled and his father confirmed its correctness with Yusuf. In response to hearing that Stevenson had recorded that he had said that the pump was painted white and blue, Rabih claimed to still recall this.

### ***Recognition of Hisham***

As with other incidents, Rabih gave us a fuller (and partially divergent) account of his meeting with Chowki's cousin Hisham than that reported by Stevenson. Hisham was riding as a passenger on the Vespa at the time of the accident but threw himself off before impact and survived with a broken leg. In addition to the Vespa, he drove a Ford Taunus, a sedan made in Germany, sold throughout Europe, and exported abroad. Rabih told us that he saw this car when Hisham was visiting a house close to his and recognized it and Hisham. Running to Hisham, he exclaimed, "Hisham, you're still alive. How are you alive? I thought you died with me." "Who are you?" Hisham asked, puzzled. "Hisham, don't you know me? I'm Chowki," Rabih said. At this, Hisham hugged him, tears in his eyes. "Why did we use to go to the hotels?" he asked Rabih, as a test. "Because there was a girl coming from Beirut. We used to love her," Rabih responded. "He just hit the ceiling," Rabih told us. He estimated that he was about 4 years old at the time of this exchange.

### ***Chowki's Death***

Rabih recalled that he, as Chowki, and Hisham were playing cards in a café they frequented when they decided to take Hisham's Vespa to visit one of Chowki's sisters

in the town of Ras el-Matn. Rabih was driving the Vespa on the outskirts of the small village of Deir Al Harf when he rounded a curve at high speed and hit a dump truck coming from the opposite direction, intent on off-loading its cargo at a trash-collection site by the side of the road. Rabih told us that he (Chowki) and the truck driver tried to avoid each other but could not. The Vespa struck the truck's front fender. Its steering wheel turned and struck Chowki in the stomach and groin and his head hit the fender.

Rabih remembers that the truck driver held him and stopped a small red car, urging the driver to take them to a hospital in Beirut, 20 miles away. He and Hisham were put on the back seat of the car. The next thing he recalls was being in the hospital, with Hisham's mother sitting beside him. She told him, "Chowki, you'll be OK. I have your watch and your ring and stuff," articles he used to have in his wallet. Chowki said to her, "I'm thirsty, I'm very thirsty, I want to drink." The attending nurse said, "Don't give him water. His blood pressure is very low. Do not give him water. He will die if you give him water." Hisham's mother said, "But can I just, with the napkin, dip it in water and put it in his lips?" The nurse said, "It's up to you." Hisham's mother did this and, "boom, I was gone. That's the last thing I remember—the napkin on my lips."

### *Encountering the Truck Driver*

Rabih told us that his father, who had worked for a while as a contractor, was asked to have a short (500-meter) extension of their road built to a neighboring house and hired a man with a dump truck to bring gravel for the road. As was the custom, the man was invited for lunch, and as he talked, he related that a few years previously he had accidentally killed a man from Qornayel on the Ras el-Matn highway when the man's motorbike struck the front of his truck. Another man was badly injured in the accident. Rabih's father listened without commenting, then called Rabih from his play and asked him to recount his memory of how Chowki died. Rabih did so and the truck driver started pulling his hair and crying. He asked Rabih what else he remembered. Rabih said that he (Chowki) and Hisham were put into the back of a red car and taken to a hospital in Beirut. The man affirmed that this had happened. The car which took Chowki and Hisham to the hospital was indeed a small red car, a Datsun 1200.

## Rabih's Responses to Hearing Additional Statements Reported by Stevenson

On the evening of October 23, 2024, after we had spent some months interviewing Rabih about his memories of Chowki, KH read Rabih additional statements attributed to him by Stevenson in his 1969–1978 field notes and 1980 book. CL was in the room on this occasion, with JM participating via a Zoom link. The items KH read were either ones Rabih had not mentioned spontaneously or which differed in some respect from his spontaneous recollections. These items can be identified from the codes “C” (cued) and “F” (forgotten) in the righthand column of Table 2. Rabih not only claimed to recall most items, hearing some prompted him to add related details not noted by Stevenson.

Table 2 supplies a comprehensive list Rabih's statements about Chowki and his recognition of people, places, and objects related to Chowki, recorded by Stevenson in his unpublished field notes of 1969 to 1978 and in his published report of 1980, and compares them to Rabih's memories related to us in 2022–2024. Rabih's statements are listed in the rough chronological order employed by Stevenson, rather than by the episodes described above. Emphasis is on evidential aspects of the statements, of paramount concern to Stevenson. Thus, Rabih's statements made before and after his first visit to the Sabra Elawar house are separated in the table, which indicates whether Stevenson judged statements true (correct), false (incorrect), or unverified. Rabih's recognitions of people, places, and objects related to Chowki appear following his statements about Chowki.

The numbers Stevenson assigned to items are marked in parentheses in the lefthand column of the table. Witnesses for published items are noted by Stevenson in his Table 6 (1980, pp. 124–145); witnesses for items from Stevenson's field notes are indicated in brackets in our Table 2. Even though he observes that he spoke to Rabih in 1972 and 1978 (1980, pp. 156, 157–158), Stevenson does not credit Rabih as contributing any of the tabulated items, and only his 1978 field notes preserve a record of an interview with Rabih. On that occasion, Stevenson was most interested in learning if Rabih retained memories of Chowki, although he did not ask Rabih to recount them. This is the occasion on which Rabih told Stevenson about meeting the driver of the truck struck by Chowki.

Correspondences between Rabih's memories related to us and Stevenson's account of Rabih's memories in childhood are shown in the righthand column of Table 2. When Rabih told us something spontaneously, mostly in our earlier interviews, the item

is marked with an S. If Rabih claimed still to remember an item when it was read to him in October 2024, it is marked with a C, for “cued.” If Rabih said he no longer remembered an item, it is marked F, “forgotten.” If Rabih mentioned something to us that was not recorded by Stevenson, it is marked N, “new.” Discrepancies between Stevenson’s account and Rabih’s memories in 2022-24 are marked D. A few items are assigned more than one code, if their details are of mixed status.

**Table 2**

*Comparison of Rabih’s Statements and Recognitions Recorded by Stevenson with Rabih’s Memories in 2022-24*

Item	Stevenson’s Notes, 1969-78, and Report, 1980	Rabih’s Memories in 2022-24
Statements Made Before Meeting Chowki’s Family		
1	(1) His name was Chowki. At school at 3 years, Rabih would not respond to his name, insisting that he was Chowki. True.	S/C: Rabih spontaneously recalled wanting to be called Chowki and when asked about the episode at school, said he recalled this too.
2	(2) His family lived at the “Sabra house.” True for Chowki.	S
3	(3) The Sabra Elawar house was beside a hotel. True.	C
4	(4) The Sabra Elawar house was at a lower elevation than the hotel. True.	C
5	(5) The Sabra Elawar house was superior to his present house. True.	S
6	(6) The Sabra Elawar house had a black iron gate in front of the stairs. True.	S
7	(7) The shutters of the Sabra Elawar house were red. True.	C
8	(8) The Sabra Elawar house had stairways inside, whereas his present house had stairways only outside. True.	C
9	(9) He had brothers and sisters. Judged partially correct, because Chowki had three sisters, but only one brother.	C: Rabih said correctly that Chowki had one brother and three sisters.

10	(10) His brothers and sisters were fat (overweight). Judged true, if perhaps exaggerated.	C
11	(11) Asaad was his father. (Said in response to discussion about him = name recognition.) True for Chowki.	C
12	(12) He had a sister named Mona. True for Chowki.	C
13	(13) His mother was twice as big as his present aunt. True for Chowki.	PS: Rabih described his previous mother as being a large woman, unlike his mother, but did not compare her to his aunt.
14	(14) "Abu Tariq" (Tariq's father) was his uncle. True for Chowki.	C: Rabih did not spontaneously use the nickname, Abu Tariq, for his paternal uncle, whom he called by his name, Yusuf.
15	(15) "Abu Tariq" owned a gasoline station. True.	S: Rabih identified Yusuf as owning the gas station.
16	(16) Once the filter on the gas pump was plugged; he went with his uncle to Beirut, and they fixed the pump. Unverified.	S: In Rabih's telling of this story, it was the nozzle of a pump that was clogged.
17	(17) "Abu Tariq" painted the pump white and blue. True.	C
18	(18) All his family lived close together. True for Chowki.	C
19	(19) He was in an accident at Deir El Harf. True for Chowki.	S
20	(20) He was driving a motorcycle. True for Chowki, assuming the Vespa motorized scooter is equivalent to a motorcycle.	S: He was driving a Vespa motorized scooter, which Rabih referred to as a "motorcycle" when talking with us.
21	(21) He had a companion with him on the motorcycle. True for Chowki.	S
22	(22) This companion was his cousin Hisham. True.	S
23	(23) They hit a truck coming in the opposite direction. Incorrect, per Hisham and accident report.	S

24	(24) They hit the truck just at [after rounding] a curve. True.	S
25	[Hamad Elawar 3/3/1970] When he saw Vespas, Rabih said that was the type of vehicle he was on when he crashed into the truck. True for Chowki.	S
26	[Hamad Elawar, 3/30/1970] When he heard that Mohammed Sabra Elawar was engaged to be married, Rabih said that Mohammed was "his" brother and was upset at not having been invited to the wedding.	C
Statements Made After Meeting Chowki's Family		
27		N: When he started to talk, Rabih told his mother she was not his real mother; his real mother had a "big butt." The description of Chowki's mother is correct, but that Rabih said this with his first words is unverified.
28		N: When he entered the Sabra Elawar house, he found his (Chowki's) mother seated cross-legged on the floor, peeling potatoes in preparation for boiling and mashing them. Unverified.
29	For Stevenson's note of this incident, see Item 61, under Recognitions.	S/N: He (Chowki) had engraved a swastika on a stone statue of Abdel Nassar to tease Mohammed, then, fearing Mohammed's response, he and Hisham had hidden the statue behind a cistern in an attic room. Although Rabih located the statue where he said Chowki had put it, the circumstances leading to this action are unverified.
30	For Stevenson's note of this incident, see Item 70, under Recognitions.	S/N: He had shot a friend, Salem, on the belt with a BB gun he was using to shoot birds in the Sabra Elawar garden, when he observed Salem stealing pears from trees in the garden. True for Chowki.

31	(38) Once a man dressed in black had come to his old house and talked to the Syrian maid through a window. True for Chowki.	C
32		N: He had attended school in Broumana. True for Chowki. (Stevenson does not record Rabih having stated this, although it is implied in Item 33.
33	(42) There was a swimming pool at the school in Broumana. True.	C
34	(43) He had worn a pair of black glasses. True for Chowki.	C
35	(44) He had owned a camera. True for Chowki.	C
36	(50) Hisham used to chew his fingernails. True.	C
37	(45) The motorcycle he was driving at the time of his accident was a Vespa. True for Chowki.	S
38	(51) The motorcycle was gold in color. True.	C: When this statement was read to him, Rabih hesitated at "gold," then said the Vespa had been yellow.
39	(52) There were badges on the motorcycle. True.	C
40	(53) On the motorcycle were written the words, "If you pass me, you can have it." True.	C
41	(54) The license number of the motorcycle was 4195. True.	F: Rabih said he did not now recall this detail.
42	(55) The motorcycle had three speeds. True.	

43		N: The truck he and Hisham collided with was a dump truck. Unverified.
44		N: The dump truck was going to unload its cargo at a refuse collection site. Unverified.
45	(46) He died, but his friend survived. True.	PS: Rabih told us that until he met Hisham, he had presumed that both of them had died.
46		N: After the accident, the truck driver flagged down a red car and put him and Hisham in the back seat. True.
47	(47) He died in a hospital. True for Chowki.	S
48		N: The hospital was in Beirut. True.
49		N: Hisham's mother was there. She touched a moist towel to his (Chowki's) lips, and that's the last thing he (Rabih) recalls. Unverified.
Recognitions of People, Places, and Objects		
50	(25) Recognition of Sabra Elawar house, leads way to house.	S
51	[Hamad Elawar, 3/30/1970] When Rabih identified himself as Chowki, Chowki's mother dropped a tray of food she was carrying.	C: Rabih confirmed this, explaining that Chowki's mother had the potatoes she was peeling on a tray on her lap. She dropped the tray when she fainted.
52	(26) Rabih went and sat in Chowki's mother's lap and, in response to a question about who she was, identified her as his (Chowki's) mother.	C: According to Rabih, he (Chowki) did sit in his mother's lap, but after she had been revived from her fainting spell. By this point, he had already identified himself to her (see Item 26).
53	(28) Recognition of Chowki's brother Mohammed.	S/D Stevenson says that Rabih's identified Mohammed as his brother in response to a question, whereas Rabih told us he did so spontaneously.

54, 55	(27, 29) Recognition Chowki's father and grandfather.	C/D: Stevenson says that Rabih encountered several members of the family in the living room when he entered, but Rabih told us that Chowki's mother was alone and that the others arrived afterward. However, when prompted, Rabih recalled having recognized Chowki's father and grandmother, in addition to Chowki's mother and his brother Mohammed.
56	(30) Recognition of room where Chowki slept	S
57	(31) Recognition the pictures had been removed from Chowki's room	C
58	(32) Recognition of place where bed had been during Chowki's lifetime.	C
59	(33) Recognition of locker used by Chowki for his clothes.	C
60	(34) Recognition of room where Chowki's brother Mohammed had slept.	C
61	(35) Recognition of Nassar statue "that had been kept in the attic of the Sabra Elawar house." Rabih had let the way to the attic and retrieved that statue.	S/C: Rabih did not spontaneously describe having led Mohammed to the attic to retrieve the statue, although when asked, recalled having done this.
62	(36) Recognition of place cycles kept under the stairs in the Sabra house.	C
63	(37) Recognition of garage with well inside.	C
64	(41) Recognition of road to Broumana.	C
65	(39) Recognition of (intersection of) road to Deir El Harf.	C
66	(40) Recognition place on outskirts of Deir El Harf where accident occurred.	C

67	(49) Recognition of Hisham	S/D: Rabih recounted his meeting and recognition and meeting of Hisham, but under different circumstances than reported to Stevenson.
68		N: He recognized Hisham's Ford Taunus car.
59	(48) Recognition of Chowki's maternal aunt	C
70	(56) Recognition of young man who had tried to steal pears from the Sabra Elawar orchard, whom he met on the road one day.	S/D: Mentioned spontaneously by Rabih, but he named the man, Salem, and told us Salem had sought him out and come to his house to question him.
71	Recognition of truck driver (noted by Stevenson, 1980, p. 158)	S: Mentioned spontaneously by Rabih, with additional details.
	<i>Note:</i> Numbers in parentheses are numbers assigned to statements in Stevenson (1980, Table 6, pp. 124–145). Information in brackets refers to Stevenson's unpublished field notes. # Items not spontaneously recalled by Rabih but presented to him on October 23, 2024.	<i>Note:</i> C = Cued; recall claimed when prompted on October 23, 2024, D = Difference; unresolved discrepancy, F = Not recalled presently; forgotten, N = New item, not reported previously, PS = Partial spontaneous recall; some elements not recalled spontaneously, S = Remembered spontaneously; still recalled

### Statistical Summary

We now summarize statistically the lessons we can glean from Table 2. Stevenson recorded 39 statements about Chowki attributed to Rabih in childhood, 37 in his book (1980) and another 2 only in his fieldnotes. Some 26 (66.6%) were reported to have been made before Rabih met the Sabra Elawar family. Of the 39 statements, Stevenson judged all but 3 (92.3%) to be fully or substantially correct. One (our Item 9) was partially correct; one (our Item 24) was incorrect; and one (our Item 16) was unverified.

In adulthood, Rabih recalled 49 discrete items, including 10 not reported for him in childhood (20.4% of the total). Of Stevenson's 39 items, Rabih recalled 17 (43.5%) spontaneously or partially spontaneously and claimed to recall another 21 (53.8%) when asked about them. He responded to Stevenson's three partially correct, incor-

rect, or unverified items in the same way he is reported to have related them as a child. Rabih said he could not recall (had forgotten) only one item (our Item 41) (2.7%). (In these calculations, we are ignoring the second code for those items which have two to avoid double-counting.)

Stevenson recorded 20 recognitions of people, places, or objects by Rabih. Of these, 8 (40%) were of people, 9 (45%) were of places, and 3 (15%) were of objects. All recognitions took place after Rabih first visited the Sabra Elawar house. Rabih spontaneously mentioned having made 7 (35%) of these recognitions and told us that he recalled making another 13 (65%) when we read him Stevenson's list. Rabih spontaneously mentioned one additional recognition, of Hisham's Ford Taunus (our Item 68), in his account of how he met Hisham, which was at variance with Stevenson's account of this (our Item 67). There were discrepancies between what Stevenson recorded and Rabih recounted to us spontaneously in three other instances (our Items 53, 54, and 70—concerning the recognition of Chowki's brother Mohammed, where Chowki's family was when he entered their house the first time, and the circumstances under which he met Salem. All four discrepancies concern Rabih's present life, not Chowki's life, and may be attributable to faulty information given Stevenson by the witnesses to whom he spoke.

## Discussion

Remembering has neurological signatures, which is what leads to the assumption that memory depends on cerebral "traces," despite the fact that even single-celled organisms such as bacteria can remember (Reber et al., 2023). Because prokaryotes were in existence long before nervous systems and brains developed phylogenetically, it is clear that the cerebral trace theory of memory is in error. Memory—at least long-term memory—must be recorded outside the brain, a logical possibility being in or on the subconscious stratum of mind (Matlock, 2019).

Matlock (2019) proposes that reincarnation involves the possession of a body by a consciousness stream that has survived the demise of another body. Upon reincarnation, there is a "reset" at the level of conscious awareness, but information in the subconscious is available to the new person and may influence him or her from within. Matlock explains the transfer of physical traits, including the neurological pathways that support both implicit and explicit memory, as a psychogenic (psychokinetic) activity of the reincarnating consciousness stream. If Matlock's model is correct, we should see patterns of past-life memory conforming to patterns of present-life memory, and we do. It is significant that Rabih's past-life memory centers on events

of emotional significance, because the emotional valence of episodic memories is known to be a major factor in their retention (Yonelinas & Ritchey, 2015). Cuing and repetition are important factors in episodic memory retrieval as well (Wimmer et al., 2020). Now, of course, there are two lives involved here. Rabih's past-life memories were of events that likely impressed Chowki and thus carried over into Rabih's mind, where they were retained until age 60 and likely will be for the duration of his life.

With most people, there is significant forgetting of memories over time (Bauer, 2015). Rabih appears to be exceptional in his retention of past-life memories from childhood into adulthood, but he is not unusual in claiming to remember as an adult some things that were not recorded for him in childhood. The 10 new items Rabih recounted constitute 20.8% of the 48 items we tabulated, less than half the proportion of new items reported to Haraldsson and Abu-Izzeddin (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzeddin, 2012) and to Pires (Ávila Pires, 2024).

In the abstract of their paper (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzeddin, 2012, p. 985), Haraldsson and Abu-Izzeddin say that the large number of new statements raises "the question of false and distorted memories," but in their text (Haraldsson & Abu-Izzeddin, 2012, p. 987) they provide an alternative interpretation: "This indicates that half of the statements remembered today are either fictional or distortions of the original childhood memories *or that the old lists of statements might have been incomplete*" [our italics]. We suspect the latter is the answer with Rabih. A closer look at the discrepancies between Stevenson's report and our interviews reveals why we believe this.

Rabih's version of his first visit to the Sabra Elawar house differs in some respects from Stevenson's. Rabih told us that, when he entered, he found Chowki's mother seated on the floor mashing potatoes, but Stevenson wrote that he encountered the entire family in the living room. According to Stevenson, Rabih went and sat on Chowki's mother's lap and introduced himself as Chowki (our Item 52). Hamad Elawar (the cousin who followed Rabih into the house) told Stevenson that Chowki's mother had dropped a tray of food when she saw him (our Item 51). Stevenson did not include this last item in his case report, perhaps because he could not reconcile it with what other witnesses had testified, but when we asked Rabih about these differences, he explained them in a way that seems to us very natural. He said that Chowki's mother was alone when he entered the house. She had the potatoes she was mashing on a tray, which she dropped when she fainted. He indeed had sat on her lap, but later, after she had been revived, and other members of the family had appeared. Rabih insists that he recognized Mohammed spontaneously, although Mohammed apparently told Stevenson it was in response to a question about who he was (our Item 53). Stevenson's

account, based on interviews with various informants, appears to condense a series of events. If Rabih's testimony is credited, however, all apparent contradictions, except for the circumstances under which Mohammed was recognized, disappear.

Rabih's testimony on other incidents—Salem stealing pairs, Chowki's last moments—likewise add context to Stevenson's accounts without necessarily contradicting them. Rabih told us that with his first words he referred to Chowki's mother as his mother "with the big butt," whereas Rabih's mother told Stevenson that Rabih's first allusion to the previous life occurred at school, when he insisted his name was Chowki and refused to answer to Rabih (our Items 1 and 2). If Rabih's version is correct, it may be that his mother considered his characterization of Chowki's mother too embarrassing to relate to Stevenson. The most divergent episode is Rabih's recognition of Hisham (our Item 67). Rabih told us that this occurred when he happened to see Hisham with his Ford Taunus, but his mother told Stevenson something different. She is Stevenson's only witness for this and it seems possible that she was mistaken or that it was her memory, rather than Rabih's, which is faulty here. Stevenson's interviews with Hisham focused on details of the accident rather than his meeting Rabih, and Stevenson's notes are silent on this issue. Unfortunately, it is no longer possible resolve discrepancies such as this, because of the deaths of witness with the passage of time.

We can document but a single significant memory failing on Rabih's part, but it is not a new one. Rabih recalls that the truck Chowki struck was moving at the time, and that he and the driver maneuvered in an attempt to avoid each other. This evidently matches Rabih's childhood memories, yet according to Hisham and the police report of the accident, the truck was stationary and unloading when Chowki hit it (Stevenson, 1980, p. 129; Stevenson's Item 23, our Item 24). It is notable that Rabih's mistaken memories of the accident are the same now as they were when he was young. Matlock (2019, p. 130) observed that although deaths are very often recalled by children in reincarnation cases, the recollections of these events frequently are distorted.

Rabih admits to having forgotten only a single item recorded by Stevenson—the Vespa's license plate number. Rabih told us that he retained even his cued memories of Chowki, although he did not always remember the occasion or occasions on which he spoke about them in childhood. In general, he said, his present memory of Chowki's life was clearer than his memories of his own early years. As in most reincarnation cases, Rabih used the first person in describing his memories, demonstrating the persisting strength of his identification with them. This identification was expressed also in his demand to be called Chowki and his expectation, when young, of being recognized as Chowki, evidently not appreciating that his altered physical appearance made this impossible.

The strength of Rabih's memories of Chowki in adulthood is all the more impressive because he seldom shared them over the years. KH, who knew Rabih in Lebanon before they both immigrated to the United States, was unaware that Rabih remembered a previous life until apprised of it by CL at the start of this study. How may we account for the strength of Rabih's memories of Chowki, then? The most obvious answer is that Rabih was presented with reminders of Chowki from the very beginning of his life. Cuing plays a large role in the emergence of past-life memory (Matlock, 2019), and Rabih certainly had numerous and pervasive cues that would have helped not only to bring forth his memories of Chowki initially but to maintain them over time.

The new items in Rabih's memories do not look to us as if they were imagined. All were related to the same set of episodic memories he recounted as a child, and it seems more likely that they did not come to Stevenson's attention, due to his reliance on witnesses to Rabih's statements rather than testimony from Rabih himself. This means that the comparison of Rabih's adult memory claims to what was recorded for him in childhood is an unreliable measure of memory retention; the baseline data are indirect, and hence compromised.

We are concerned here with a single case study, and cannot know how widely this conclusion is generalizable, but it would seem to point to a compounding factor in all memory retention studies that rely on data collected from adult witnesses, rather than the children with the past-life recall, for baselines—which would be most reincarnation cases. Stevenson never explained why he did not interview his child subjects, but he rarely did. Our guess is that it has to do with doubts about the ability of many young children to recall events on demand and ethical issues related to unintentionally reinforcing their memories, thereby keeping the children mired in the past rather than furthering their adjustment to present circumstances.

It may not be possible to develop reliable and ethically sound procedures for interviewing young children about their past-life memories, but we believe that older children certainly can be and should be interviewed. Stevenson missed an opportunity to interview Rabih in depth when he was 14, but people in middle to late childhood have sometimes been consulted to good effect. Jürgen Keil was able to solve a case on the basis of interviews with 6-year-old Kemal Atasoy (Keil & Tucker, 2005) and Matlock (2019) heard a significant new memory claim (consistent with an autopsy report) from 10-year-old Rylann O'Bannion. Researchers working with older children whose past-life memories are still active would be well advised to interview them. Interviewing children directly not only would provide a good baseline for later memory retention studies but would bypass questions about the reliability of memories of adult witnesses reporting what they observed with the children.

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