

SOUL SURVIVOR

by Bruce and Andrea Leininger

p. 3 The screams came out of nowhere. Just three weeks past his second birthday...in the darkest hour of midnight, he was flopping around on his bed like a broken power line, howling at the sky as if he could crack open the heavens with his ear-shattering distress.

p. 9 ...the nightmares did not stop. After the second, there was another the next night. James would skip a night, sometimes two, but the nightmares kept coming with terrifying regularity and increasing frenzy. Often five times a week. And they were all, every one, spine-tingly creepy.

p. 11 He was lying there on his back, kicking and clawing at the covers...like he was trying to kick his way out of a coffin...then I heard what James was saying..."Airplane crash! Plane on fire! Little man can't get out!"

p. 16 "Oh, look," said Andrea, plucking a small model propeller-driven plane out of the bin. She handed it to James..."And there's even a bomb on the bottom," she claimed...but what James said,--this little child in diapers—made her stop cold in her tracks...."That's not a bomb, Mommy. That's a dwop tank."

p. 21 (at the air museum)...Bruce had a hard time keeping James behind the barriers....James plainly was struck powerfully by something he saw...and he stood openmouthed with wonder. (time to go) And then James screamed—the piercing shriek of an enraged child...even stronger—a thwarted child....Bruce ...was perplexed....and so they revisited the World War II planes twice, three times, and a one hour trip turned into three.

p. 33 The plane that James held in his hand had no propellers. He had repeatedly crashed his toy plane into a coffee table in the den, breaking off the propellers. In fact, he had done that to all the planes that Bruce had bought him in Dallas—crashed them all into the table again and again, breaking off the props.

p. 47 One night in late June, James was kicking and thrashing, and Andrea finally came to hear and understand precisely what her little son was saying.

"Airplane crash! Plane on fire! Little man can't get out!"

The thing she noticed—the truly unnerving thing—was that he was kicking and thrashing exactly like someone who was really trapped inside a burning airplane!

p. 54 (reading a rhyming book) And in the middle of it, James lay down on his back beside Andrea and said, "Mama, the little man's going like this," and then he kicked his feet up at the ceiling, as if he were upside down in a box, trying to kick his way out...."Who is this little man?" ...he said in a strangely quiet little voice, "Me."

p. 56 (after a nightmare) Bruce asked, "Son, what happened to your plane?"

James replied, "It crashed on fire."

"Why did your airplane crash?"

"It got shot."

"Who shot your plane?"

James made a disgusting face and rolled his eyes. "The Japanese!" he said with the disdain of an impatient teenager.

p. 59 (Jen was visiting) "...I just wanted to ask you something: how did you know it was the Japanese that shot your plane down?"

James said, "The big red sun."...James was describing the Japanese symbol of the red sun painted on their warplanes.

p. 68 (Andrea was reading with James and he brought up the plane crash and she went to get Bruce.)

"James, tell Daddy about the little man."

"Little man's airplane crash on fire."

Andrea asked, "Who is the little man?"

"Me."

Andrea asked, "Do you remember the little man's name?"

And he said, "James."

Bruce took over the questioning. "Do you remember what kind of an airplane the little man flew?"

"A corsair."

"Do you remember where your airplane took off from?"

And James said, "A boat." (Bruce was dumbfounded. How did James know about aircraft carriers in WWII?) "Do you remember the name of your boat?"

"Natoma."

"That sounds pretty Japanese."

James got annoyed. "No, it's American." (He gave his father an impatient look.)

Andrea said, "Tell me again what the little man's name was."

"James."

Bruce later looked up Natoma. "Natoma Bay was actually a United States aircraft carrier that fought in the Pacific in WWII."

p. 78 When putting James to bed, Bruce said, "No dreams about the little man tonight, okay buddy?"

James said, "The little man is named James, Daddy."

"Baby, your name is James," offered Andrea.

But James insisted, "The little man is named James, too." (She asked if he remembered the last name, but he did not.)

"Can you remember anyone else in the dream?" asked Andrea. "Any friends?"

James remembered Jack Larsen and said he was a pilot, too.

p. 91 Bruce and James were looking at a book about the battle of Iwo Jima that was a present for Bruce's father. James pointed to a picture of Iwo Jima, and said, "Daddy, that's when my plane was shot down....That's when my plane got shot and crashed."

Researching in a book, Bruce found that Natoma Bay had been at Iwo Jima in March 1945.

p. 100 Bruce found a man who had served on Natoma Bay who remembered Jack Larsen. (so he was real.)

p.105 James began to draw pictures of air battles with bullets and bombs exploding. The planes were propeller driven aircraft—no jets or missiles. James named that he had drawn Wildcats and Corsairs and said the Japanese planes were called Zekes or Bettys. He explained that the boy planes were fighters and the girl planes were bombers. Bruce found on the internet that James was right.

James signed his drawings, "James 3."

p. 109 James said that Corsairs used to get flat tires a lot and always wanted to turn left when they took off.

p. 121 Bruce attended several Natoma Bay reunions and found information. He found that Jack Larsen was still living.

p. 124 Bruce discovered an airman who had been killed named James M. Huston, Jr. When he told Andrea, she put it together. James M. Huston was the 2nd, and that's why this James calls himself the 3rd.

p. 132. Bruce found that James M. Huston was the only man from Natoma Bay who was killed at Iwo Jima. Bruce was stumped by the fact that records said James Huston was flying a Wildcat but James said it was a Corsair.

p. 153 James told Bruce that he picked him because he knew he would be a good daddy. "When I found you and Mommy, I knew you would be good to me." This was not the voice of a child, although it came out of the mouth of a four-year-old. He explained that he found them at the big pink hotel in Hawaii. "I found you on the beach. You were eating dinner at night." (Andrea got pregnant five weeks later.)

p. 156 James got a 2nd G.I. Joe for Christmas. The first was brown haired and James named him Billy. The 2nd was blond and James called him Leon. A year later, 2002, Santa brought a 3rd G.I. Joe with red hair. James named him Walter.

Bruce asked how come James named his GI Joes Bille, Leon, and Walter.

"Because that's who met me when I got to heaven."

Bruce went to the list of men he had found who were killed aboard the Natoma Bay. On the list were James M. Huston Jr., Billie Peeler, Leon Conner, and Walter Devlin. They were all killed in 1944 and Huston was killed on March 3, 1945. They were already dead when James Huston was killed over Chichi-Jima. They were waiting for him in heaven. (As Andrea researched and found families of the dead airmen, she found that their descriptions matched the GI Joes.)

p. 200 (They found James Huston's sister, Anne, who was 80. She sent some pictures of James M. Huston. One picture was startling: it showed James Huston standing in front of a Corsair!)

p. 201 First paragraphs summarize the facts that had been uncovered so far.

p. 236 When James talked to Annie on the phone, he would speak of their father and their mother, and it sounded like something that a sibling would say. He would speak of their dead sister, Ruth, with the familiarity of a brother. Five year old James knew about their father's alcoholism and family secrets.

Annie sent a portrait that was made of James Huston as a child, and James asked, "Where is the picture of you?" No one knew about that picture in the attic. Annie accepted the fact that James was her brother.



Bruce, James, and Andrea Leininger



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James Huston

James Leininger



James Huston James Leininger



James Huston



James Leininger



James Leininger



James Huston



James Leininger and Jack Larson,
a pilot who flew with James Huston



James Leininger and James Huston's Sister