

## **Book Review – Soul Survivor**

**By Bruce and Andrea Leininger with Ken Gross,  
Grand Central Publishing 2009**

*Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI*

From time to time we are going to review books relating to aviation; some fiction, some non-fiction; some current, some classics; some fairly well-known, some obscure. What is on your book shelf?

“Soul Survivor” is a book that has and will continue to generate comment. Not too surprising, the internet is full of comments, many of them heated, some of them foul, regarding the authors, the subject matter, and seemingly anyone related to the story. Is it a hoax? Is the story of well-meaning but misguided parents? Or is it, in fact, exactly what it says it is – a mom and dad’s search for truth about their son through a very unusual situation?

The story involves James Leininger, two years old when the story opens, and his parents, Bruce and Andrea. To Andrea’s horror, young James awakes in the middle of the night, screaming for no apparent reason. What kind of nightmare can a two-year old experience? As time goes by, the nightmares continue – not every night, but often.

As James ages, he becomes enamored with aircraft. But not just aircraft in general. He becomes enamored with the Corsair, a US Navy plane used in

the Pacific theater in World War II. His nightmares continue. Over the next few years, he talks about a particular ship, and particular pilots. And he screams to have the fire put out so that he might live.

The conclusion that his parents slowly reach is that James is actually reliving the last minutes of the life of James Huston, a Navy fighter pilot who died in World War II. For Bruce and Andrea, two people with an unshakable belief in the Christian notion of life everlasting after death, the concept of reincarnation is unacceptable, and the thought that their own son is himself a reincarnation even more so.

The story is told straight-forward, with less emotion than I would have expressed had it happened to me. The authors draw no conclusions, make no predictions. They merely relate the happenings of two years of their young son’s life.

Whether you approach this book as a parent, as a person of faith, or merely as an aviator, you will find it worth your time.

What’s on your book shelf?

*Chris loves to read, write, and fly, but not necessarily in that order  
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