

Adventures with the Shroud In the Beginning...

By David Rolfe



Preproduction on *The Silent Witness* began in 1977 soon after Ian Wilson (Second from right) had sent me the idea for the film and Harry John (Far left) had put up the money thanks to the introduction made by Fr. Peter Rinaldi, arrowed. I am offering a bottle of champagne for the first person to identify the most individuals present.

In front and to the left of Fr. Rinaldi is Dr. John Robinson, Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge, and famous for his controversial book, *Honest to God*. He questioned both the Virgin Birth and the prospect of a “Second Coming”. However, perhaps because of its “tangibility”, he was fascinated by the potential authenticity of the Shroud and keen to find out more. Hence, I invited him to join Ian Wilson and myself at this seminal Shroud conference and, subsequently, he also flew to Colorado to take part in a filmed discussion with John Jackson and Eric jumper, also both arrowed. Undoubtably, Dr. Robinson’s participation gave the film a status that lifted it above the run of films that speculate about the “supernatural” and ensured that it got reviewed accordingly.

It was quite an adventure for me, personally. You may just be able to pick out a platinum blonde in the back row, Betty Watkins. She sponsored and accompanied Rinaldi’s main partner in Shroud affairs, The Reverend, Adam Otterbein. He and Otterbein made a good team. Rinaldi, a Salesian - Italian and effusive. Otterbein, German, a Redemptorist and very down to earth. Especially when it came to contractual matters which it duly did once Harry John offered to finance the film.

Betty kindly invited me to break my journey home by taking a detour to stay with her for a few days at her delightful home in Miami. For a few days I was immersed in the social whirl in which she lived her life and sampled the delights of Miami’s best restaurants.

Some of you may remember the TV series “Flipper” about a semi-tame dolphin. The series had finished, and the studio used had become vacant and stood on an empty lot. Betty had some friends that were interested in reviving it and I was invited to investigate it as a viable investment. We came close until a consultant *whispered* to me that the reason the studio lay vacant was that it was too good an option for producers so the Teamsters Union, who had exclusive rights for all transport jobs on movies, vetoed it as they wanted all production to remain in New York where they all lived.



Betty had given me the use of her Cadillac Seville (above left) while I was there. All went well until Miami finally got some rain for the first time in weeks. I touched the brakes and to my horror, this” tank” of car, just slid even faster and into the back of a young lad’s beautiful Thunderbird just like the one above right. His father was called and soon came along but was just so pleased that no one was hurt decided to do nothing about it and, thankfully, Betty, too, was forgiving.

The Shroud has given me a lifetime of adventures and they keep coming. Most recently, an invitation to attend the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington.



The image only captures about 25% of the auditorium. Everyone was served with a full, hot breakfast. A catering tour de force!



I was there at the invitation of Myra Adams (standing) to launch the \$1M Challenge to replicate the Shroud. This was initially made exclusively to the British Museum. Now it would be open to “All Comers” in the USA. To my left is Russ Breault. He is the same vintage as me and been a Shroud advocate even longer. We met once before on a trip I made to visit Father Albert “Kim” Dreisbach¹. Myra had booked a small conference room for a Press Conference to announce her initiative which they duly did.

BSTS readers may remember that this “Challenge” was initially made exclusively to the British Museum on the UK release of *Who Can He Be?* and it got headlines in the UK’s and Italian national press. So far, given that their erudite verdict on the Shroud was that *“Some forger just faked it up and flogged it”*, The British Museum have made no attempt to claim the \$1M on offer? How could that be? Perhaps, if you have the energy, you might ask them.

The US Catholic Press did give this press conference a splash, but, as far as I am aware, there was nothing in the secular press. And no one has, as yet, come forward to win the \$1M. Of course, any contenders were directed to the page on the whocanhebe.com website that simply lists the (undisputed) characteristics of the Shroud image. The Challenge remains open if you know anyone who might like to win that kind of money.

A very pleasant personal bonus for me on this trip once it was complete was to head north to Martha’s Vineyard to meet a up with very dear friend and colleague. The last BSTS issue included an obituary for Tom D’Muhala who I once visited many years ago and met and befriended his son, Chris.

¹ Father Albert “Kim” Dreisbach was an Episcopal priest who made his way from Philadelphia down to Atlanta in the mid-1960s to participate in America’s civil rights movement. He was a pioneer of Shroud studies and one of those to whom I made a beeline in my Shroud research. Some years later, when, in a rush of blood to the head, I decided to take my Shroud passion to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, he gladly volunteered to come and present. That’s another story!

My other great interest has always been the water both in it and on it. I was a boat owner as soon as I could afford one. What I found something of a nuisance was the business of getting the boat on and off its trailer and then finding somewhere to put the trailer. I came up with a design for a boat that could fold in half across the beam and have retractable wheels. I showed the sketch to Chris D’Muhala and, to my delight, he agreed to come to the UK and build a prototype which he duly did. (See below.) It would become “Boat of the Year” at the London Boat Show and eventually named “Ezyboat”.



Winner of Boat of the Year at the London Boat Show!



As you might imagine and there was much to reminisce about as well as mourn Tom. Where will the Shroud take me next? I don't know but I will follow it to the ends of the Earth.

