

## The man with no memory: Navy vet wakes up, speaks only Swedish

By Elizabeth Cohen , Senior Medical Correspondent  
July 16, 2013 -- Updated 1424 GMT (2224 HKT)

CNN.com

---

**(CNN)** -- When police found the unconscious man in a Southern California Motel 6, the IDs on him said he was Michael Thomas Boatwright from Florida.

But when the man awoke at Desert Regional Medical Center a few days later, he said he'd never heard of Boatwright.

He didn't recall serving in the U.S. Navy. Or of being born in Florida.

When doctors told him he had five tennis rackets in his hotel room, he couldn't say why.

When they showed him photos of himself with others, he didn't recognize them, or himself.

And he didn't speak a word of English.

The man said his name was Johan Ek.

And he said it in Swedish.

That was back in February.

Today, the 61-year-old man says he has come to terms with the name "Michael Boatwright," but only because doctors told him he should.

He still feels like Johan Ek from Sweden.

And he can't explain why.

The case was first reported by the Desert Sun.

Car crash leaves Australian woman with French accent

### Digging in the past

Before she became a social worker at Desert Regional Medical Center, Lisa Hunt-Vasquez was an archeologist.

Those digging skills came in handy the day she met Johan Ek/Michael Boatwright.

Her mission: Help Boatwright figure out who he is.

She first contacted the military.

Among the IDs police discovered on him was one from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

He'd served from 1971 to 1973 in the Navy as an aviation mechanic.

Hunt-Vasquez dug deeper.

### **The Asia connection**

She found a website for the TRP English school in China.

Turns out Boatwright taught English there for four years, until May.

In an essay he wrote for the site, he mentioned he worked as an English instructor in Japan for 10 years, and that he was married to a Japanese woman. They have a 12-year-old son together, he wrote.

The leads looked promising.

But there was one hitch.

Photos found with Boatwright in the motel room showed a young man living in what looked like a European city, not Asia.

Hunt-Vasquez kept searching.

She came across several websites dedicated to graphic designs. Boatwright often used the screen name 'korstemplar' and listed himself as a Swede living and teaching in China.

The pieces were falling into place.

### **A roadblock**

He had lived in Japan, married, became a father. He then moved to China.

The school in China told her he was divorced.

He lived there until May, when his visa expired and he flew to California.

But when she contacted the Japanese and Chinese consulates, neither had next-of-kin information for him, according to the Desert Sun.

Staffers called all the numbers on the phone Boatwright had with him. They either went to voice mail or no one picked up, the newspaper said.

She had hit a dead end.

### **His life so far**

Everything Boatwright knows about his life before February 28 he knows because his social worker told him or because he read it on websites.

He told CNN he learned that in 1987 he operated a consulting company called Kultur Konsult Nykoping.

That is somewhat of a Swedish connection.

He doesn't have any independent knowledge of his life before he woke up in the hospital. He doesn't even know exactly what his consulting company did.

Boatwright told CNN he'd been a good tennis player, and the Tennis Channel had interviewed him years ago.

Perhaps, he said, he'd come to southern California for the tennis tournament season. That would certainly explain the five rackets in his hotel room.

### **A 'fugue state'**

According to the Desert Sun, Boatwright is in a "fugue state."

People in this condition lose their sense of personal identity, according to the Cleveland Clinic. They become confused about past events and often wander far from home.

Fugue states, such as dissociative fugue, are often triggered by trauma, such as the death of a loved one or a serious accident, according to Dr. Aaron Anderson, a neurologist at Emory University School of Medicine.

Patients sometimes assume different personalities, Anderson added.

The relatively rare disorder often goes away on its own, but it can take several months.

### **What the future holds**

Now that Boatwright's story has spread to the Swedish media, several Swedes have come forth to say they knew him in the 1980s.

Late Monday night, the Desert Sun reported it found Boatwright's sister in Louisiana.

"I haven't talked to him in years. He just disappeared," Michelle Brewer told the paper.

Learning about his life hasn't helped him much psychologically.

He still feels isolated in the hospital, so Hunt-Vasquez encouraged him to reach out to members of the local Swedish-American community.

"They said he was getting depressed because he wasn't able to communicate," said Linda

Kosvic, chairman of the Vasa Order of America chapter in San Jacinto, California. "We've been trying to provide him support and make him feel more comfortable."

Members visit him in the hospital, bringing him Swedish foods.

The hospital would like to discharge Boatwright, but they have no place to send him, said Richard Ramhoff, a spokesman for Desert Regional Medical Center.

They can't send him home until they know where home is.

CNN's Per Nyberg, John Bonifield and William Hudson contributed to this report.

---

© 2013 Cable News Network. Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. All Rights Reserved.