

How much of what I consciously see, or focus upon, will I remember? Why can memory not grab every sight my brain perceives and store it away for future retrieval? Why, for example, can I not recall the license plate number of the car ahead of me on the road yesterday morning? I had forgotten the number moments after I turned off the road and into my parking lot. I can remember looking at the number; I can even recall thinking there was something unusual about the number. But I do not remember the number. I will never remember the number. The number is not present in my memory storage. Why? Was it because there was no reason to collect it? Because it was extraneous information? Or does my memory simply have an aversion to collecting numbers?

Unfortunately, there are no answers to these questions. Researchers do not know why we remember the particular things our brains choose to collect and file away for future use. Or why we forget others. There are, of course, certain kinds of experiences people in general tend to remember: traumatic events, momentous events, startling sights, and the hundreds of specifics that define each of our lives, from our social security number to the brand name of our favorite toothpaste. No one can explain, however, why one person remembers, in glaring detail, an ugly print that hung over the bed in a motel room she stayed in for two nights in 1990. Or why another person cannot remember even the smallest visual detail from the restaurant where his first meeting with his future wife took place.

Certainly the most disturbing thing about memory is its notorious unreliability. Not only do we not possess a record of all of our life experiences, the life experiences we remember may not be accurate. We may even recall detailed and specific memories of events that never occurred. Memory, it turns out, proves to be fertile ground for suggestibility, with lots of room for growing and changing.

Actually, if we take the knowledge bucket metaphor seriously, it is easy to understand why memory undergoes change. Whatever is stored in the brain changes because the brain itself changes. Memory is made up of two kinds of information: the original perception of the event, and information supplied after the perception of the event. It is impossible to predict how new perceptions will effect resident memories.

To complicate memory matters even further (and to bring us back into the theatre design ballpark), human brains are quite proficient at turning the