

## BOOK REVIEW

*K. H. Mueller,<sup>1</sup> M.D.*

### A Review of *Why Did My Baby Die?*

---

**REFERENCE:** Bergman, A. B. and Choate, J., *Why Did My Baby Die?* The Third Press, Joseph Okpaku Publishing Co., Inc., 444 Central Park West, New York, N.Y. 10025, 1975, 152 pages, \$6.95.

The title of this slim book, hardly more than a bound pamphlet, is meant to catch the browser's eye in the local library. It caught mine, perhaps because I have heard the question put sometimes angrily, sometimes beseechingly, and was therefore naturally curious about the authors' answer. The message is essentially Paul's recommendation to the Corinthians—faith, hope, and charity: faith that continued investigation will turn up something useful; hope that this will come about in the near future; and especially charity, the greatest of the three, directed toward the stunned and grieving parents. If you must deal with sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), be you policeman, physician, neighbor, relative, or friend, then perusal of this book will be worth your while. The authors' style is vigorous, their argument lucid; their rhetoric is sometimes polemical, but nearly always persuasive. Summing up: a helpful book on a distressingly common mystery.

There is, alas, no new light shed on our understanding of the etiology or mechanism of SIDS; the reader will, however, find the epidemiological, clinical, and pathological data on the syndrome pithily summarized along with a cogent discussion of unproved and disproved theories on its cause(s) and mechanism(s). He will also find a useful historical sketch of SIDS, as well as more recent developments in the form of concerned parent groups. The admirably humane methods used in Seattle/King County and a few other places are contrasted with those that are justifiably decried as barbaric. A few horror stories are retold of parents being callously flung into jail: an unfortunate consequence of confusing child abuse with SIDS.

The emphasis throughout the book is on the sympathetic treatment of the grieving parents. We can, as Milton suggests, "also serve who only stand and wait": by communicating with the parents, hoping to assuage their misplaced guilt and allay the suspicions of others; by compassionately dealing with the anguished family that has waked to find their dead baby, and ask that most frustrating question: "Why did my baby die?"

<sup>1</sup>Lt. Col., USAF, MC, Division of Forensic Pathology, Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, Washington, D.C. 20306.