

BOOK REVIEW

Roger E. Mittleman,¹ M.D.

A Review of *Unnatural Death—Confessions of a Medical Examiner*

REFERENCE: Baden, M. and Hennessee, J. A., *Unnatural Death—Confessions of a Medical Examiner*, Random House, New York, NY, 1989, 210 pp., \$17.85.

Unnatural Death is a mini-primer on forensic pathology for the general public. All kinds of death and medicolegal investigation are presented, chiefly from Dr. Baden's personal experience and consultative work, which includes the deaths of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John Belushi; the trials of Claus Von Bulow and Dr. Carl Coppelino; and the Attica, New York, prison riot of 1971. Appropriate emphasis is placed on the terminal circumstances, the scene, the toxicology, and the autopsy so that the reader will appreciate that the medical examiner does not work in a vacuum and that the autopsy findings are often consistent with the various manners of death. A drug-dump death looking like a homicide, an alcohol overdose simulating a strangulation, and certified crib deaths that are actually murders give the reader a true sense of the problems associated with such investigations. Dr. Baden also criticizes forensic and medical experts for inappropriate conclusions based upon incomplete consideration of the preponderance of the evidence as well as for basic misinterpretations of the facts.

Although some of the presentations are familiar to forensic pathologists, they are variations on themes that we discover over the course of our careers and, hence, provide food for thought for future encounters. In addition, Dr. Baden's experience in the politics of the "Big Apple" is intriguing, and certainly some of us may be able to draw cross comparisons with current and past situations.

One criticism of this book is that there has been considerable coverage of "bungled" autopsies and misinterpretations by other pathologists. There is no doubt that these events occur too frequently; however, more emphasis should have been given to the good that has come out of studies and investigations by others. A goal of this book is to increase the public's perception of the need for more qualified professionals, but such individuals do exist and deserve more credit. Another consideration is the absence of photographs or diagrams: well-chosen, illustrative material would have enhanced the text and made it more exciting.

In summary, Dr. Baden, with the assistance of cowriter Judith Adler Hennessee, has authored an interesting, nicely written book about medicolegal death investigation, chiefly by case analysis. This book is written for the general public and serves that purpose well.

¹Associate medical examiner, Dade County Medical Examiner's Office, No. 1 Bob Hope Rd., Miami, FL 33136-1133.