

BOOK REVIEW

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The Forever Angels: Near-Death Experiences in Childhood and Their Lifelong Impact by P. M. H. Atwater, LHD, Bear and Company, 2019, 232 pp., \$18.00 pb (ISBN 978-1591433583); \$11.99 Kindle ed. e-book; \$13.22 audiobook

Contributions to the study of near-death experiences (NDEs) tend to be either popular or scholarly, with a few works charting a middle course between these poles. This new book by P. M. H. Atwater is of the latter variety. It is aimed at a wide audience but includes scholarly appurtenances such as occasional footnotes, endnotes with references, and an index. These elements notwithstanding, it will likely appeal more to the general than the academic reader.

This is the latest installment in Atwater's work addressing children's NDEs. In *Children of the New Millennium* (1999), she reported on a study of 277 NDErs, many of them children, who seemed to have developed heightened sensory and empathetic abilities as a result of their experiences and who were poised to guide humankind into a new stage of evolutionary growth. Material excised from that book by the publisher was presented in *The New Children and Near-Death Experiences* (2003). Atwater developed these themes further in *Children of the Fifth World* (2012). For this most recent volume, she interviewed several hundred NDErs—she did not specify the exact number—in adulthood about the NDEs they had as children up to five years of age, drawing also on interviews with many other NDErs—over 5,000, she informed readers—during her 40 years of investigation. Her stated goal was to evaluate the long-term aftereffects of NDEs experienced in early childhood.

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The book consists of an introduction followed by 17 chapters illustrated with many of her subjects' drawings, then the endnotes, a list of suggested additional readings, a list of Internet resources on NDEs, information on the International Association for Near-Death Studies, and the index. In the first eight chapters, she addressed her subjects' memories of the NDE itself, in the next seven chapters their reports of aftereffects, then a chapter on historical cases, followed by two chapters of commentary on her overall observations.

Atwater has found that child NDErs are different from adult NDErs. "Most cannot compare 'before' with 'after' *because they don't have a 'before'*—at least not in this world," she said. "They emerge as outliers, called upon to create new ways of living and loving" (p. 4). She found that NDE aftereffects for children include psychic and intuitive abilities and a pervasive feeling of being "homesick for heaven." She explained,

I call this book *The Forever Angels* because it is an in-depth look at tiny ones who are forever part of where they left. . . . No matter how long child experiencers live, the vast majority never lose their sense of HOME, the memory of where they came from, where we all came from. They still remember. We forget. (p. 203)

Atwater reported that 33 of the childhood NDEs she collected followed intrauterine problems and 33 followed problems at birth. Another 21 occurred during infancy or in the earlier months of life outside the womb, six occurred between 12 and 18 months, six from 24 to 30 months, 12 from 4 to 4.5 years, and 14 at 5 years (p. 13). All of her interview subjects claimed to recall events in a discarnate realm before their conception; this is the "home" to which she referred in the above quotation. A few of her subjects reported past-life memories. She found that these experiences stayed with her respondents and affected them into adulthood in a variety of ways, impacting family life, dating, marriage, education, health, and spirituality. Some respondents had histories of spontaneous out-of-body experiences or experienced post-traumatic stress, suggesting a high level of dissociative tendencies possibly stemming from their childhood NDEs. As in Atwater's earlier sample, over 70% of respondents reported having had suicidal thoughts, and two had actually attempted suicide.

Each chapter in this book was replete with case material, often including quotations she attributed to her subjects. All in all, I found this book to be a provocative read and one that readers particularly interested in childhood NDEs are likely to find interesting.

References

- Atwater, P. M. H. (1999). *Children of the new millennium: Children's near-death experiences and the evolution of humankind*. Three Rivers Press.
- Atwater, P. M. H. (2003). *The new children and near-death experiences*. Bear.
- Atwater, P. M. H. (2012). *Children of the fifth world: A guide to coming changes in human consciousness*. Bear.