BOOK REVIEW

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P. M. H. Atwater is one of the earlier researchers of the near-death phenomenon no doubt motivated to a large extent by herself having had such an experience. Atwater has authored six books on the subject and had numerous articles appear in Vital Signs, the newsletter of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). In presentations at a number of IANDS conferences, Atwater reported that she feels that of all her books, Children of the New Millennium is her most important work to date. Her excitement for the book and its potential to affect mankind is reflected by a quotation from the back cover of the book:

Atwater believes these millennial children—who possess heightened sensory and empathic abilities acquired at birth or as a result of the near-death experience—herald the presence of a new race of people on Earth. This groundbreaking book explores how these special children will dramatically impact the human condition by helping humankind rediscover the spiritual truths needed to survive in our radically changing world.

Also on the back cover is glowing praise for the book by four highly respected writers in the field.

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I have read all of Atwater’s earlier books relating to near-death experiences (NDEs) and found them interesting and informative. This book, however, she claimed was different than the others because it was based on empirical research and statistical analysis and was not limited to the reporting of anecdotal accounts of the type which tend to typify NDE books.

I am a professional researcher and therefore anticipated some solid facts and figures into which I could sink my teeth. I have taught research methods and statistical analysis at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in departments of sociology and economics, and for five years was employed by the United States Atomic Energy Commission—now the Department of Energy—as a program evaluator, where I came to appreciate well-designed research. I know that it is difficult to do quality research in areas where the subject matter cannot be observed directly. Near-death research is certainly such an area. I was therefore especially interested in Atwater’s research instrument, which was a lengthy questionnaire, and the statistical tool she used to analyze her data, which turned out to be limited to the percentages of individuals who responded in particular ways.

Atwater begins her book by stating:

> Children of the new millennium are different from those of any other generation of record. They are unusually smart, even gifted; identify with “alien” existences whether past life-oriented, extraterrestrial, or multidimensional; and they are natural creative intuitives. (p. 1)

Atwater then refers to a number of other researchers to support her conclusion that significant changes in children’s intelligence, among other things, are occurring. The other researchers do not state why or how this might be happening, but Atwater believes that she knows why:

*Life utilizes random unpredictability to guarantee continuous change and advancement.*

Evolution operates the same way in the human family.

Always, sudden changes, quantum leaps in physiology and consciousness, have catapulted the growth and development of humankind beyond that which can be explained. As “missing links” are still standard fare in trying to understand the evolution of our bodies, so, too, are there missing connectors in any attempt to rationalize the evolution of consciousness.

Until now. (p. 7)

Atwater goes on to argue that the missing link is the near-death experience.