

Sudden infant death; still a medical mystery

By LORRAINE McCLELL

A seminar at Wayne State University last month to educate the medical profession on the ways of the sudden infant death syndrome, mandated a far cry from the lack of information or misinformation that was available to a Farmington couple who lost their son to the medical mystery in 1966.

It was only by chance that Marilyn and Donald Dumas were led to a small group of persons in Coscocton who furnished them with information on the phenomenon and reached out to give them consolation. From there the couple reached out to other parents who had suffered the same fate, and within a few months had formed what is now the Michigan Regional Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Foundation (SIDS).

Sudden infant death sometimes known as crib death, causes about 10,000 infant deaths every year in the United States.

An apparently healthy infant, usually between the ages of four weeks and seven months is put to bed without a suspicion that anything is out of the ordinary. Later the infant is found dead.

There is generally no evidence that a struggle has taken place.

An autopsy, at most, reveals a minor degree of inflammation of the upper respiratory tract, but no lesion sufficient to account for death. For the most part, the autopsy reveals no evidence of illness.

THE DEATH LEAVES the family in a state of trauma, very often with guilt and very often with prolonged depression. Coupled with this, case histories have revealed that in many instances police and medical authorities have been less than kind to the bewildered parents.

Though the deaths and the accompanying factors are still going on, the June seminar at Wayne was the first of its kind in Michigan, drawing together doctors, pathologists, nurses and the public, giving in-

formation relative to the most recent advances in research into the causes and factors involved.

Research has been upped considerably and most recently with funds from the state legislature.

Federal funding has come to cities which show the biggest incident of sudden infant death. At the top of that list is Chicago and Detroit.

The Michigan Jaycees and Jayettes have selected the SIDS Foundation as its national project.

There is a central telephone number, listed under Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, to call for immediate help or information.

Parents' groups have been formed to help one another, gain information and raise money for research.

And the phenomenon has been written up in the Congressional Record.

OF THE VOLUME written for the Congressional Record by the subcommittee on children and youth, Mrs. Dumas said, "That is quite a memorial to my son. His short life helped others. He has touched a lot of lives."

Mrs. Dumas said she and her husband had no idea, or intention of starting "anything so big as a foundation. We knew that

there must be other couples like us in Michigan just as much in the dark as we were, and we wanted to talk to them."

Consoling the newly-grieved parents was her big thrust, and though the chapter has grown in all directions around her, her function now is mainly to contact those parents.

"This is where my strong feelings lie," she said. "I send personal notes and I let them know I am here to talk to them because I've gone through it and I know what they are feeling and how they are hurting. I want to help them with their first and immediate need."

For months she was her own speaker, bureau, her own publicity agent, her own fund raiser and publisher of literature.

Her goal, she said, "was to let these parents know they were not alone."

OF THE RECENT seminar, Jan Maloney, a resident of Royal Oak and current president of the Michigan SIDS, said, "It was encouraging to hear all the types of research going on throughout the country. And though some of the medical terminology went over our heads, we all came away with more knowledge on the scientific aspects of the subject."

SIDS babies are no longer thought to be

healthy babies, but have subtle abnormalities which are not detectable to the naked eye of either the medical or lay person.

For a long while, death was suspected to be caused by suffocation, aspiration or regurgitation and this was written on the death certificate.

Consequently, statistics were mixed up a factor the SIDS has since straightened out in some degree and is still working on with its educational programs.

The next big push for the chapter, said Zoe Simulek, a public health nurse and coordinator for the Michigan Regional SIDS Center, is "to stimulate research in this state. So far as I know there is none going on in Michigan."

The center, where information on sudden infant death is available, is located at 400 E. Lafayette, Detroit.

Persons wishing more specific information about factors associated with SIDS may request the pamphlet, "Summary of Proceedings, Second International Conference on the Causes of Sudden Death in Infants," from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

However, the overall mystery remains. All research to date proves that SIDS cannot be predicted and cannot be prevented.



MARILYN DUMAS

Bible School

Shalom, Freedom, and Christ

By CORINNE ABATT

Bible school is as much a part of summer for many youngsters as perfect summer camp and baseball.

For the past two years two Farmington area Catholic churches, Our Lady of Sorrows and St. Alexander, have combined efforts for a large, two week Bible school program.

Some 70 pre-school through junior high school children attended the program at Our Lady of Sorrows under the guidance and leadership of 70 volunteers. Gene Grabbe was overall program chairman and Mrs. Mary Ann Hickey was coordinator.

While this program is structured similar to many other programs of this type—storytelling, arts and crafts, devotional periods, drama and dance—there is one rather colorful difference.

For the two weeks both staff and youngsters come dressed as people in Biblical times.

Rev. Jim Wright, pastor of St. Alexander, was dressed in a striped green and white robe as he told a story to a quiet audience.

Mrs. Hickey and some of her volunteer staff wore full length orange costumes, typical of early times.

The costumes are just one more touch to help send home the overall theme 'Shalom, Freedom and Christ.'

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Mrs. Hickey, assisted by Kathy Mansueti and Therese Rosperini, said a summer program of this scope doesn't just suddenly happen. It takes a lot of dedication on the part of the 70 active staff members plus many hours behind the scene by mothers who come up with some special lunches.

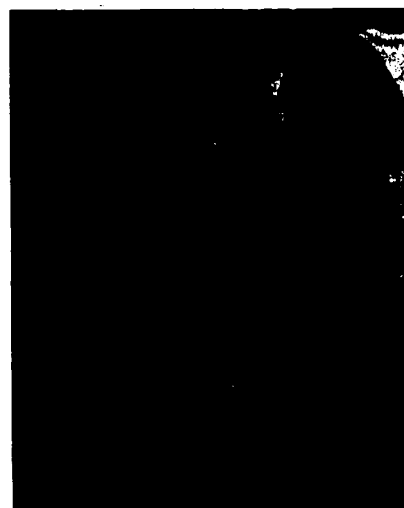
Mrs. Hickey mentions St. John Lutheran Church in Farmington. "The people there gave us a lot of help with the program."

This program follows the trend of many community endeavors. Ages and types of people are mixed rather than segregated. Father John Quinn, assistant pastor of Our Lady of Sorrows, drops by regularly to participate. Nuns and lay teachers share responsibilities. Older children help with the younger ones. Everyone pitches in to offer his best skill.

Mrs. Hickey smilingly said, "It's great because no one person is expected to do it all."



Five-year-old Jimmy McCurdy does some pasting during arts and crafts time.



Dawn Cortez pins Nicole Rittig's name tag on.

Staff photos by Harry Mauthe

On nice days, classes take to the outdoors.

Rev. Jim Wright tells a story.