

# THE MURDER OF ALBERT STEVENS

The Clinton Administration has made a useful and worthy fetish of releasing documents that confirm longheld suspicions of deliberate radiation exposure of American citizens by their government over the past 50 years. The purpose of these dangerous experiments was to research on live human beings the effects of radiation on the human body which would help scientists and military planners formulate possible scenarios for nuclear warfare and defense as well as design progressively lethal nuclear weapons. The most frequent exposures were during the early years of the Cold War and the most numerous affected were several hundred thousand soldiers deployed near the ground zeros of nuclear bomb tests to determine combat capacities in nuclear war. But the most despicable and sinister research was upon private citizens who submitted to medical tests with little or no knowledge of the risks involved.

The newly formed Atomic Energy Commission (now the Energy Department) licensed the use of radioactive isotopes in human research in the 1940s, with no oversight of medical personnel, and authorized the deliberate release of radioactive elements into the

environment. (Some experiments were conducted at the Hanford nuclear reservation in Washington State, as well as radioactive material released into the atmosphere). Workers at nuclear plants and medical subjects at hospitals and universities were among those tested. They numbered at least 9,000 (the number is expected to go higher as more documents are released) and included children, new-born infants and foreigners.

A 1949 document said the radiation tests were "an opportunity to secure the type of medical information required...to interpret, in terms of human experience, the toxicological findings of small animal research."

Albert Stevens was one such subject or radiation research and was tested at the University of California at San Francisco in 1945. He died in 1966.

"We are proud of shining a light on this previously untold part of the atomic age," said an official of the Energy Dept., which the current majority in Congress wishes to abolish for precisely that reason.

-MPMc

## BY BILL HOLMES

In 1945 when my grandfather, Albert Stevens, was injected with plutonium at the University of California at San Francisco so the effects could be compared to the effects in rats, I was almost 4 years old; just 38 days younger than the 4 year old boy who was also injected with plutonium at UCSF.

I think about my two boys and how small and trusting and innocent they were when they were 4.

A few months ago I read the documents released by the Energy Department concerning my grandfather. It was overwhelming.

Looking back at it I can see that as I was learning what was done and said by whom I was also looking for any signs of an awareness by these people of the legal and moral quagmire into which they were sinking. I saw enough to convince anyone that they were very much aware that they might be faced with some accountability for their actions in the steps they took to assure the utmost secrecy of their deeds. Beyond awareness of culpability I was looking for some signs of human feelings, of any kind of remorse or thought for my grandfather and what his life meant to him and to us.

I was disappointed to find so little feeling on their part and others who defend them.

I remember my skin crawling in horror and I was shaking all over as I watched a tape made of a C-SPAN news coverage of testimony about this and I listened to the list of things that were removed from my grandfather's insides to be studied for signs of damage from his injection of plutonium.

It's like I can close my eyes and see all those things they took out of him lined up on a tray.

I felt a great emptiness inside myself after listening to that.

Just as the word plutonium rolls smoothly from the tongue, so did the jaws of these scientist/doctors and military people close smoothly, silently and forever over the life of my grandfather.

I remember my grandfather talking to his canaries and finches to get them to sing for his small grandson. There was a piano that he let me bang on until nobody could stand it anymore and he would lower the cover over the keys. In the backyard he had a wonderful orange tree with the sweetest oranges and along one wall were blackberries loaded with fruit in the summer. In the garden there was rhubarb and my grandmother would make stewed rhubarb and rhubarb pie.

I learned a tremendous amount about the outdoors from my other grandfather, but Al Stevens did very little out of doors during the time that I knew him. He was not able to be very active at all. But his spirit was still strong. His sense of humor remained with him. He was always joking about something.

I don't want to think of my grandfather as some kind of victim. I want to think of him as having beaten those scientists, as rising above them, having the last laugh, surviving in spite of them. They tried to cheapen his life by lowering it to the level of a laboratory rat while pretending to themselves that their lives were worth more than his.

He was never guilty of such atrocities.

He never had the protection of a university or the military or an industrial giant of the government.

He was naked and defenseless.

In Yakima, Washington, not far from Spokane where what is left of my grandfather's ashes are kept for further study of the radioactive effects of plutonium on people, my first son was born in September, 1964. My grandfather met Steve the next summer in 1965. In 1966 Albert Stevens died.

Last Christmas I received a delightful video of my granddaughter learning to walk and talk and dance. Life goes on.



MARSHALL ARISMAN

I confess I am a very proud grandfather.

And a very proud grandson.

Perhaps these doctors and scientists and others have grandchildren of their own. If so I'm sure they view the careers of their grandparents with pride for their accomplishments are many.

These grandchildren are not faced with the scalding proposition that their grandfather was seen by powerful and accomplished people as having no more value than a laboratory rat in one of their experiments and that his life could be simply thrown away when they were done with it.

These people placed a higher value on their careers than on the lives of the people they used to advance those

careers. They felt like they could wipe their boots on my grandfather's life and get away with it.

I find it offensive to hear people saying that it was all right to do these things at the time.

The people at Nuremberg had their excuses too.

There was no excuse then just the same as there is no excuse now and for the same reasons.

The people who did this to my grandfather have only to ask themselves how they would feel if they were in his place. Any code of ethics or scientific experiment involving humans must it seems to me begin and end with that very simple question.

We have the opportunity to learn from mistakes. There is a valuable lesson in all of this and it should be utilized, not ignored or the same mistakes will be repeated. There is apparently not much of a structure in place today to keep this kind of thing from happening again and again.

I don't want to clog up my heart with feelings of revenge but my head tells me that without some personal accountability for these actions the message will remain very clear to those involved in human experimentation that if you have a dirty little secret and you can keep it hidden long enough with the help of your colleagues and government then you have nothing to worry about, no fear of any damage to reputation or estate.

If the consequences for such crimes against humanity are small then the crimes themselves will be regarded as small and petty and not worth worrying about.

I think some acknowledgment of this should be placed on each campus where these crimes occurred, in some prominent spot in the science and medical departments. Perhaps a list of the doctors and scientists and their various awards and recognitions and opposite them a list of the people they did these things to and a short history of what they did to each one. Something that will acknowledge that this occurred and that it was done by rather prestigious people. Something that will remind with less intent of destroying reputations than in using this as an example for others to beware of losing sight of their own humanity in the pursuit of their goals.

This issue should not be shelved until it can disappear under the carpet once more. For the sake of us all some restrictions against this type testing should be put in place.

I want very much to personalize this issue because I think it's important for us to be aware that decisions are made on a very personal level and any steps to raise the consciousness of the scientific/industrial/military community must take this into account. Suggestions and guidelines are not enough. There must be spelled out specific penalties to dissuade the same type of drive for recognition and personal gain that will cause someone to overstep the boundaries of humanity. They should never again be allowed to flaunt their power and authority in such brutal fashion.

In trying to write this I found myself saying the same things with different words:

1. This should never have been allowed to happen.
2. What was done was brutal, callous, careless and arrogant.
3. Specific steps must be taken to discourage further proliferation of a similar attitude in the field of human experimentation.
4. Sunlight is far more healing than darkness.

With that may I remind all of us that the uncovering of this began with one person from Albuquerque and her moral outrage, determination, courage and perseverance. She, by herself, has done more to heal these wounds than anyone.

I pray that God will take special care of my grandfather.

Bill Holmes lives in Spokane, Washington

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