



ALBERT STEVENS & GRANDSONS (1948)

ARE WE ALL UNWITTING LAB RATS?

Letter to Reed Tuckson, M.D., Chairman of the Outreach Committee of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments:

I have been wanting to write to you and others since returning from Santa Fe but I am a gardener and since the rains have stopped I've been busy.

I would like to thank you and your colleagues, Drs. Ruth Macklin, Duncan Thomas and Steve Klaidman for maintaining a comfortable atmosphere of openness and honesty which is the best way to get at the truth as you so aptly expressed in your reply to the lady in the audience who felt the scientists present were criminals.

I am grateful I was able to testify in Santa Fe. Having the Navajo folks there made me feel very secure. I wish I could have stayed to hear everything.

I've been haunted ever since by an image in a story with an altogether too familiar ring to it. The image is in the Navajo man's testimony about how, thinking he was taking good care of his family by having a job in the uranium mines, where he worked with no protection at all, he would return to his family covered with this poisonous element to play with his children while his wife boiled his work clothes in a pot and scrubbed them clean by hand.

The rest of us were plugging in our washing machines to the power supplied by that uranium.

Just as my grandfather was needlessly and carelessly sacrificed in a project that immediately led to the end of a world war and which ultimately led to the end of the Cold War and our becoming the most powerful nation on earth, so were the Navajo—who gave us the gift of the raw material—needlessly sacrificed.

What would it have cost to provide them with some protection? Why was it never done?

Every citizen of this country is living more comfortably because of the power provided by the Navajo uranium. The entire world breathes easier now that the Cold War is over. The United States is the most powerful country in the world with its rich supply of uranium, a gift from the Navajo people. And what do we do while enjoying all the marvelous benefits from this gift? We turn our backs on them and leave them hanging out to dry.

Wash your hands, folks.

My heart weeps for this man's secret and undeserved feelings of shame and guilt when he is by himself and thinks about having unknowingly brought this double-edged element home to his family.

The carelessness with which my grandfather and the Navajo and many, many others were regarded by people making decisions about the health and lives of others is too often committed, condoned and protected by our own government; and that is where the problem lies: how are we to protect ourselves from our own government?

The decision makers and those who carry out the decisions remain comfortable ensconced in a citadel of protective legislation tailored to their precise needs. Not only can they perform their deeds behind a monstrous network of secrecy but when they are found out they remain in little danger of any kind of reckoning or accounting or restitution because they have a heavy blanket of legislation designed to protect them. It's no wonder they do as they please with other people's lives. Their position has been made very nearly impregnable.

Why is our country doing these things to its own people and then protecting the ones who have done it? Do not think that

we can remain detached from these things. Our personal involvement is too intertwined: our attachment to electricity, to a University system, to medical clinics, to pharmaceuticals, to the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe. Our daily living is affected by these decisions and to continue to ignore it jeopardizes us and our children.

Our present situation is not entirely like that which existed during the Nuremberg trials 50 years ago. Then the people involved in human experimentation had fewer laws to protect them. Today there are any number of laws designed to protect the large universities, large industries, the military and other departments of the government. They are all as closely allied today in the area of human experimentation as it is clear they were allied in my grandfather's situation.

We are all in the same situation. It may happen to any one of us, not just the indigent or those who are hospitalized or prisoners or in the military or living on an Indian reservation. Ask some of the women with silicone breast implants. Ask women who have had problems from birth control devices. Ask people who are concerned about genetic engineering or putting growth hormones in our food.

There has been created an atmosphere surrounding human experimentation which places financial gain well above concern for the health and well-being of our people.

By protecting those involved in human experimentation who demonstrate a lack of concern for human rights our government impedes the process through which we can address this issue and take effective steps to curb further abuses. Honesty and openness, while sometimes difficult, is still the first step in clearing the path to putting an end to abuses.

The fact remains that as long as our government supports and continues to protect those involved in human experimentation we are all at risk of becoming the unknowing subjects of one of these experiments. As long as those who cross the boundaries of humanity continue to practice their profession without fear of punishment none of us is safe. We can never feel secure in our doctors' offices, in our schools, in our workplaces, in our grocery stores, in our drugstores, whenever we take a drink of water or breath of air. Knowing that we may at any time become the unknowing subjects in somebody's experiment or that we may already be subjects in an experiment or the victim's of someone's carelessness is unnerving.

By drawing the government in as an ally, business has been able to create the kind of protection it needs to continue its experiments unhampered by any regard for human rights. The government must return to its function of protecting the rights of its citizens over the interests of business. There is an opportunity in all of this to gain some trust from the people of this country by making the groups and individuals responsible more accessible and accountable not only now but in the future as well.

There will always be those who are willing to profit by forcing others to suffer. We will always have to be aware of them and the need to defend ourselves from them.

It was heartening to hear that at least two of the universities involved in the plutonium experiments have made public apologies for their part in them. I am disappointed to hear that the University of California is not yet ready to begin the process of healing.

~BILL HOLMES

VOICES OF FRIENDS

TO THE EDITOR

Somehow in the course of a busy visit recently with my folks (Lois and Ross Adams), I never managed to find you and say hi...but I thought about you, because in their apartment (in Astoria) I found a copy of the Marpil '95 *Times Eagle*, and read it on the train on the way back.

You've published lots of good things (how's about that for self serving!), but I think never a better collection than in that issue...particularly "Trees Are Us", "Mourning in America", Revolt of the Bats" and "What My Contribution Will Be To Clatsop County."

As the train inched across the West, and I battled my usual thoughts about this country, the essays, and the fact of the whole brave publication, were the voices of friends.

~ROBERT ADAMS
Longmont, Colorado

*Robert Adams is a photographer whose many books of photography of the American West have received awards. His latest, *West From The Columbia*, was recently profiled (and he was the cover person) in The Daily Astorian's *Panache* Magazine (Oct. 19). His essay "In The West What Is There To Hope?" (with several of his photos) ran in the Sept. '86 NCTE, and an article "Trying To Learn About Animals" appeared in the Dec. '89 issue.

STALKING ME

Silent and still
Are the streets
Eyes piercing
Eyes watching

Sleep-awake
Feeling violated
Intruded fear

Endless calls
Without callers
Maddness replaced
By silence

Guilt; pain for a lost soul
Screams for help
Obsessive behavior out of control
Why not just let me go?

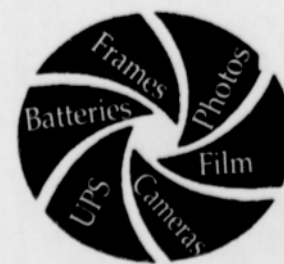
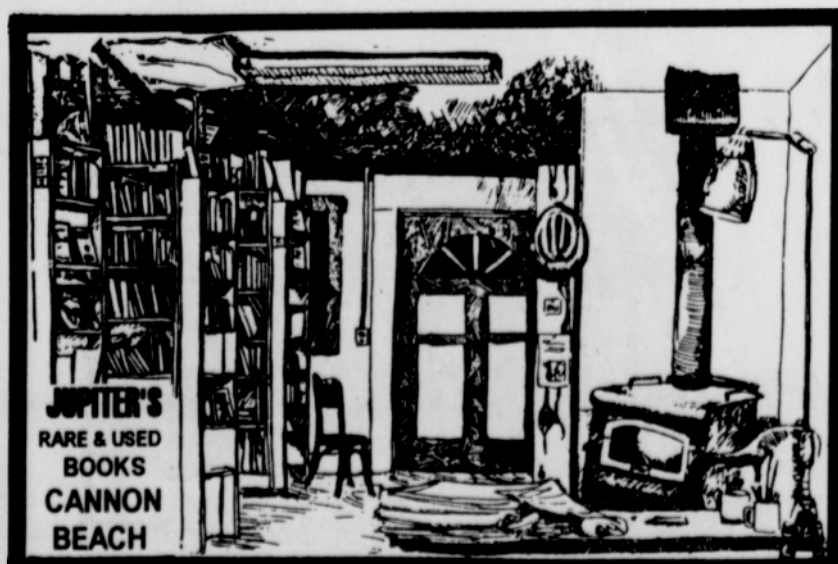
~J.L.



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