

THE Treatment

THE STORY OF THOSE WHO DIED IN
THE CINCINNATI RADIATION TESTS



MARTHA STEPHENS

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appear on the last printed page of this book.

Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

—WILLIAM BLAKE

This book is dedicated to the ninety victims of the human radiation experiments in Cincinnati General Hospital (1960–1972); it has been written so that history may remember their injuries and afflictions, and their unwitting sacrifice in a project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense and carried out by researchers in the College of Medicine of the University of Cincinnati.

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Preface

This book is the story of one tragedy of medical research that stretched over eleven years and affected the lives of hundreds of people in one Ohio town. A word might be said about the way it came to be written.

As I explain in the opening chapters of the narrative, I had known, for over two decades, about the tragic train of events that had taken place in our public hospital in Cincinnati, but for all those years a conspiracy of silence on this subject reigned and I did not think it could ever be broken. My life proceeded in other directions, and it was not until new circumstances in 1994–95 that I began to feel I might be able to relate the full story of the experiments and the injuries and deaths that had occurred. In 1994 new information emerged that had been hidden away for many years—a mass of private correspondence, for instance, within the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. I learned for the first time the identities of the victims and met their surviving families. I could examine the full hospital records.

Since I was myself involved in the efforts, both in the seventies and again in the nineties, to open the case to the public at large, my own story of study and detection and eventual cooperation with the press, forms part of this account. Whether this is for good or ill, others will have to judge; but it would have seemed to me disingenuous, to say the least, to have approached the subject any other way.

The primal tale, nevertheless, must lie in the details of the experiments themselves, and in what exactly happened to the victims as new groups of people ill with cancer were brought into the study year by year.

Readers not greatly interested in the step-by-step unmasking of the case in the press in 1994–95, may find what concerns them most in the final two parts of this book. What I have termed “the medical story” and then “the legal story” are recounted as human dramas in themselves, but as for factual accuracy and completeness, I wrote with the hope that they would withstand the scrutiny of scholars in medicine, law, and human experimentation. I am not an expert in any of these fields, nor in the deliberate exposures of the Cold War. My aim was to recreate the full anatomy of one major medical project gone badly wrong.

BUT SUCH A BOOK as this can hardly be the work of one person. Many people helped make the telling of this story possible, and their endeavors were critical and indispensable.

From the beginning of the legal action in 1994, Jennifer Thomas, in the offices of Cincinnati attorneys Kircher, Robinson, Newman, and Welch, and then of the firm Newman and Meeks, sent me all the documents I asked for and more as the suit progressed, and answered endless questions on the telephone. Thanks to her work on this case, it became one of the best-organized lawsuits known; this book is one of the beneficiaries of her labors and of the generous cooperation of the two firms named above.

The early chapters of this volume, recounting the at times day-by-day evolution of the story in the press, could not have been written without the assiduous work of David Logan, today the director of a well-known alcohol program for low-income people, but once my colleague in the English Department of the University of Cincinnati and president of the UC Junior Faculty Association at the time we issued our critique of the experiments in 1972. Beginning in 1994, Logan kept a superb anthology of the ever-spreading mass of news reports. He accompanied me to hearings around the case and was always ready to advise and consent, consider and consult in late-night, exploring conversations that helped me settle my own views about what was taking place. He helped bring about the congressional hearing in Cincinnati in 1994.

In that same year Laura Schneider was a graduate student in English at UC, and she went to work on this case with unflagging energy and nerve, and succeeded in finding the four surviving families who made possible the filing of the lawsuit by Robert Newman. Schneider also

kept detailed tables of data on the full list of victims as to what we were learning about each one; this record I constantly referred to as I wrote, and it still hangs, in a greatly enlarged version, on the wall of my study. Schneider read the early drafts of this book and made copious notes for my elucidation. In due time she also located a Kentucky family who would otherwise not have become known and who became the subject of feature reports in the *Lexington Herald-Leader*. An undergraduate student, Bridget Marion, was also a valued coworker on this book for over a year, as was my student assistant, Mary Ann Thomas.

I must also offer special thanks to Doris Baker, an individual of unusual penetration whose grandmother was irradiated in 1962. Baker became the founder and leader of a Cincinnati organization of surviving families. She remained alert to everything happening around this story for over five years, and was thus a flooding fount of knowledge about the perspectives of family members and the workings of journalists, attorneys, and official Washington.

All the families I came to know I have regarded as partners in the unveiling of this long-suppressed story; the crucial information they supplied can be read in the pages of this narrative. I am especially grateful for the many important conversations I had not only with Doris Baker but with Lilian Pagano and family, Barb Tatterson, Barbara Ann Mathis, and Joseph P. Larkins, each of whom had close family members irradiated.

A number of reporters also became *compadres* in this mission to render the darkness in which this case had been enveloped penetrable at last, and their stories, too, are recounted in this narrative. I was happy to be able to work with two talented British journalists, Julian O'Halloran and John Slater. They made extended visits to Cincinnati and featured the UC tests in documentaries for the BBC. It was a pleasure to work with reporters who go about their tasks in an open, inclusive spirit without screens and distances; they furthered my own understanding of how this project would be regarded outside the United States. The 1994 program O'Halloran created, with producer Barbara Want, was titled "The Sacrifice Zone" and aired on the Panorama Show. John Slater, with producer Peter Hoare, made a comprehensive three-part radio program on U.S. Cold War experiments titled "Atomica America," the opening segment of which spotlighted the Cincinnati tests.

I must mention, too, the careful and exhaustive work of another enterprising journalist described in this book, Akira Tashiro, senior staff writer of the daily paper of Hiroshima City, Japan, the *Chugoku Shimbun*.

I am most grateful to Scott Simon and senior editor Gwen Tompkins at *Weekend Edition* of National Public Radio for allowing me to give on the air a detailed account of the Cincinnati tests and to present facts of the case that most national media were not prepared to acknowledge.

Peg Rusconi and her editors at Cincinnati's WKRC made the comprehensive and accurate television reports in early 1994 that gave this story its first public life, and a few weeks later, Nick Miller broke the print story in exhaustive detail in the *Cincinnati Post*. At the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, Linda Reeves pursued this case, once she engaged with it, with dogged accuracy and precision, giving us an expressive parade of front-page interviews with families that effectually settled the question of consent. Dilva Henry made contributions of several important kinds on Cincinnati's WCPO.

At the *Enquirer*, Tim Bonfield, who is known in Cincinnati for studious medical reporting, eventually took up the technical side of this issue in a long series of crucial reports. He and reporter Steve Bennish played out their parts in the best journalistic style, as did an editor at the same paper, Tony Lang, who brought to this story an open mind and a disturbed conscience and was a steady ally in the attempt to keep the publicity accurate and up-to-date.

As to the media world, I was more than happy to make the acquaintance in 1994 of a peerless raker of muck of old-time habits of mind and conscience, Eileen Welsome, now of Denver, Colorado. It was Welsome's uncovering of the identities of the plutonium victims and her series of articles in the *Albuquerque Tribune* in 1993 that led to the sudden explosion of interest in other Cold War tests. I met Welsome when she visited Cincinnati in 1994, and she and I later explored in long and discursive telephone conversations the history of U.S. deliberate exposures. In a sense, her work on this early period was the progenitor of all the rest, and her comprehensive account, in *The Plutonium Files*, of the historical roots of the Cold War radiations is a work of lasting importance. Welsome read my completed manuscript and responded, most generously, with chapter-by-chapter questions and annotations.

My talks in 1994 with David Egilman, a physician in Braintree, Massachusetts, whose findings about the UC project are described in this book, were always interesting. Carl Gandola, a clinician in the Cincinnati Health Department and one of the very few doctors in Cincinnati willing to discuss this subject with me, read with great care and perspicuity two drafts of this work and twice gave me splendid notes and suggestions.

As to readers of manuscript, I must also thank not only Eileen Wel-
some and Carl Gandola, but Jennifer Thomas, Herb and Judy Shapiro,
Robert Newman, and my husband, Jerone Stephens.

Herbert Shapiro, my long-time friend and colleague in the History Department at UC, known especially for his scholarly work in African American history, was a trusted consultant all along, and Judy Shapiro as well. They have had for some years a deep personal interest in the victims of the Cincinnati tests, and Herb Shapiro served with distinction on the radiation panel appointed by Cincinnati City Council in 1994.

Many friends in Cincinnati progressive movements could be counted on for encouragement in the pursuit of this story, including the late Maurice McCracken and the late Buddy Gray, loved and respected warriors for peace and justice in the downtown neighborhoods of Cincinnati where many of the test subjects had lived.

I would like to thank Gary Stern of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation for many frank exchanges about the experiments and his willingness to confront facts of the case that were not being otherwise acknowledged. Stern waged a good fight within the Committee, and in spite of this group's determination not to examine any record of actual injuries and deaths, was able to help bring about a generally accurate, if limited, account of the Cincinnati tests in the Committee's Final Report of 1995. I am grateful, too, for the encouragement of Committee member Jay Katz, retired professor of law and medicine at Yale, whose distinguished work on human experimentation is described in these pages.

The enterprising work of attorneys Robert Newman and Lisa Meeks is the subject of many scenes of this book; they played crucial roles in the legal action that helped bring the case before the public, an action that led to a landmark federal ruling on dangerous human research and

the citing of the Nuremberg Code. Their fellow attorneys David Thompson, Robert Nelson, Gary Lewis, and David Kamp, and each of the office staffs involved, must also be remembered with appreciation.

I would like to thank David Sterling of the UC History Department, Carol Rainey in English Studies, ex-City-Councilman Tyrone Yates, and Judy Daniels, medical director of the Cincinnati Health Department, for their steady interest and encouragement. My friend Donna Kopp, a nurse and paralegal, provided invaluable help with medical terminology. UC archivist Kevin Grace was always willing to assist. My literary agent, David Hendin, has been active on behalf of this story and a true believer in the need for it to be made known.

On the campus of UC, my daughters Paige and Shelley Stephens and their fellow activists in the peace and justice brigade were stalwart public defenders of the rights of the families to be granted complete information about what had taken place.

Back in the seventies, political scientist Henry Anna was an intrepid and ingenuous colleague during the endeavors of the UC Junior Faculty Association to bring these experiments to light.

My husband, Jerone Stephens, has labored in an infinite number of ways to help make the events in our hospital better understood. In the seventies he wrote incisive political analyses of what had taken place, and as for my own work, he continued to believe that in spite of a marked visual limitation, I would be able to compose this account. He and I discussed in detail almost every facet of this story, and he not only read manuscript but found footnotes, keyed in complex passages, and read for me directly or onto tape many documents, books, and other materials not available from libraries for the blind and impaired.

The adaptive equipment and student reading assistants provided me by the UC Department of English and the College of Arts and Sciences helped make it possible for me to continue teaching for some years and to complete this study and other writings.

Mary Beth Lukco, a volunteer from the Hamilton County Library for the Blind, provided most generous assistance in the final stage of this project.

Last, I must mention Reynolds Smith, Executive Editor at Duke University Press and my editor for this book, an individual of courage and insight. I realized early on that most presses were not going to want

to engage with a narrative as severe in its critique of U.S. medicine as this one. But Reynolds Smith, when he read this story, was disturbed by what he learned about our public hospital of the sixties and its military experiments. He felt that the facts were the facts and needed to be made known. His associate Rebecca Johns-Danes was also a warm and always encouraging partner in this project and the kind of exacting editor every book needs. Lynn Walterick's careful copyediting was a valuable contribution. All citizens interested in humane medicine and humane government, common justice and respect for all people, will be comforted, I hope, in these sometimes dark days, in what Duke University Press has been willing to set before us.

Prologue

In 1953 a woman named Lula Tarlton was working as a domestic for a family in Cincinnati. One day, waiting for a bus to go to work and straightening the blouse of her white uniform, she felt a lump under her collar bone. She realized at once that she might have breast cancer and instead of going to work, she made her way to Cincinnati General Hospital.

Tarlton did have breast cancer, and a few weeks later she had a right mastectomy, then the following year a mastectomy on the left. For over five years Tarlton lived a normal life, but then complications and more treatments ensued.

In the spring of 1960, unbeknown to Tarlton and other cancer patients, a new research project had begun within Cincinnati General Hospital for the U.S. military. This project needed subjects who could be irradiated over their whole bodies as if for treatment for cancer. On December 4, 1960, Lula Tarlton was exposed to a large dose of total body radiation in a specially built room in the basement of the hospital. The radiation was given in one continuous dose in an effort to simulate the exposure of soldiers in nuclear war.

Tarlton's niece, Barbara Ann Mathis, remembers well her aunt's last illness and her radioactive treatment. In the hospital a two-inch-thick metal shield was placed at the foot of her bed and the family told to stand behind it when they came to visit, not to approach the patient.

Lula Tarlton and her niece both lived in a small African American enclave in Cincinnati's East End, a long corridor of lower-income neigh-

borhoods that runs outward from the city along the eastern stretch of the Ohio River. Over that Christmas, Mathis took her aunt home with her to the East End. Tarlton was vomiting profusely and becoming more and more ill. A bucket was kept upstairs for her to vomit in. She was soon returned to the hospital and fell into convulsions. No treatment availed—in time the doctors noted that she was “totally unresponsive,” and on January 22 Tarlton died.

No one in Tarlton’s family knew that she had been used in an experiment, nor that she had had radiation over her whole body. No consent form had been offered her. According to the doctors, patients were being told “they were being treated for their disease.”

Many years passed, and in 1994 Barbara Ann Mathis was working as an information clerk in the same hospital where her aunt had died. She was reading the morning paper during a break at her desk one day when she saw her aunt’s name and began to weep. She wept because the paper reported that her aunt had been experimented on, and also because her name was printed among the names of those who had no relations. To think that her aunt had had no one to claim her, as if she had been all alone in the world, was the most sorrowful thing of all, Mathis said. Tarlton was sixty-six when she died, those many years ago, and the youngsters in the family had known her only as “Aunt Lula.” Mathis felt that she herself might be the only living person who could still recognize her aunt’s full name.

In time Mathis spoke to a coworker that day. “I wish you would look at this,” she said. “This is my aunt—here is her name. And look at this that happened to her.”

Barbara Ann Mathis had known her aunt well and remembered her as a strong woman who could do anything she made up her mind to. She loved to travel. She had come to Cincinnati from Bryson, North Carolina, and she often went back there to visit. Once she took a young grandchild by the hand and got on a train to California, just for the fun of it, and though she didn’t know a soul out there to call on.

“She just loved to go,” Mathis said.

Mathis read in the papers that a legal action had been filed on behalf of the families of the victims of the experiments, and she contacted the attorney whose name she saw. Many patients, she learned, had been less

ill than her Aunt Lula when they were exposed and yet had died within weeks of their radiations.

Mathis became part of the legal action, and in 1999, after many bitter disputes among the contending parties, thirteen researchers and their institutions agreed on a settlement of over five million dollars with their accusers. A memorial plaque in honor of the ninety victims of the experiments was placed in a yard of the hospital.

In time the surviving families began to learn the full story of these strange events—how it was they had come to pass, and why so few had ever known of them.

I

The Story of the Press and the Public Campaign

The First Public Knowledge of the Tests

It is clearer and clearer to me that life is not held sacred in this country; it is cheap.—SENATOR MIKE GRAVEL, 1972

Life, we all know, does not run a true course; it twists and turns on us and brings us up against the most unexpected circumstances.

In the fall of 1971, ten years after the death of Lula Tarlton, new radiations were still taking place in our public hospital in Cincinnati. But the first tentative explorations were being made by the press, and that October a small story appeared in the *Village Voice* that would restructure my own life for a full year and more, and affect my thinking deeply for many years to come.

I was a teacher of English, but the research I undertook that winter had nothing to do with literature—I took up the study of radiology.

What I learned about this science made me so respectful of radiation that I began to refuse to have even a chest x-ray or x-rays at the dentist. My husband and I decided that our children were not going to be irradiated at all except in a genuine medical crisis, and for years we had running disputes on this issue with our doctors and dentists.

Over that fall of 1971 I acquired—in a curious way which I shall presently describe—certain critical documents on the experiments, and during the December holidays that year, I sat up late at our dining room table, after children were put to bed, amidst a sea of books and papers on radiation, including reports sent to the Department of Defense from

the medical school at my university. I was learning that, just as the *Village Voice* had suggested, medical professors on my campus were conducting experiments on radiation injury, using human subjects, and the experiments were being funded by the Defense Atomic Support Agency of the Department of Defense.¹

The trouble was that the researchers were not looking for subjects to study who had been exposed to high radiation *accidentally*, but were exposing people directly right in the hospital.

I was studying the case histories of eighty-seven individuals who had already been part of the experiments. Many of these people were coming to a tumor clinic at the hospital run by our College of Medicine at the University of Cincinnati. They were being irradiated over their whole bodies—or sometimes half their bodies—in one fell stream of radiation. The great majority knew nothing about the team’s study of radiation injury or being part of any research whatever, and thought they were simply being treated for their cancers. But I was learning that the military radiation they were being given had virtually no chance of improving their health.

Indeed, twenty-one of these eighty-seven people had died within about a month of being irradiated.

Very few of these individuals had been acutely ill or lying close to death, and those who survived the severe short-term effects of the radiation, the crucial first month or so when bone marrow is most likely to fail, often lived a long time. A number of patients were still active at home or at work when they were brought in for this treatment; some had only recently been diagnosed with cancer and were in the hospital to be evaluated.²

I was examining closely certain case histories, including that of the domestic worker “L. T.,” our “Lula Tarlton,” as we would know her in later years—the “Aunt Lula” who loved to ride trains.

A patient we would eventually know as “Maude Jacobs” was another case that drew my rapt attention. “M. J.” was forty-nine, the doctors wrote, when she was irradiated, and she had breast cancer that had apparently spread to her bones.

But Jacobs had been at home caring on her own for three young daughters, keeping house and cooking supper and so on, when she was called in one day for a “treatment.” She had no one to take her to the

hospital and had put on her hat and called herself a taxi. Her oldest daughter, from an earlier set of children born to her when she was very young and still living in the Kentucky hills, came in that day to take care of the smaller ones. Jacobs was given a large dose of radiation over her whole body. She went home again, but the next day was so violently ill that she was taken back to Cincinnati General Hospital. She died there twenty-five days later, desperately ill and mostly out of her mind.

Jacobs's medical profile in the doctors' reports records her white blood cell counts and platelet counts, two classic indexes of radiation injury to the bone marrow. These two blood scores started falling seven days after radiation and went down to almost nothing the day before she died.³

When the bone marrow fails and no new white blood cells can be made by the body, infection swoops in and there is nothing to fight it with.

Death will ensue.

I HAD LONG BEEN used to reading in plays and novels of tragic deaths, full of pity and sorrow, but as I wrote for a newspaper years later, I had not been used to this pity, this sorrow . . . of people sick and confused coming for help and then being brutally abused. It was clear that these tests would have to be brought to an end and that any of us on campus who could help must do so.

The report I wrote after Christmas that year was issued at a press conference on January 25, 1972, by a group of untenured professors called the Junior Faculty Association.

Though the experiments had been going on for eleven years, I was the first person, as far as I knew, in Cincinnati or indeed in most of the country, to read as I had the actual case histories. I had been shown the small piece in the *Village Voice* by a colleague, and did not know at the time that the first person to have unearthed the UC project and to have referred, at least, to possible patient deaths—was an independent journalist named Roger Rapoport, and that the work he was doing on a book called *The Great American Bomb Machine* had become known among certain writers in the eastern press and was the reason we had been able to read what we had in the *Village Voice*.

The Vietnam struggle was still ablaze, and like many other citizens

around the country, those of us in the Junior Faculty Association were involved in resistance to that war. In the spring of 1970 there had been the bombing of Cambodia, and then in our own state of Ohio, the killing of four student protesters at Kent State by the Ohio National Guard. Thus, the report we had read in 1971 about Defense Department activity at UC had been discouraging, to be sure, since we would have been happier not to have had any military research on our campus. Still, the details had not seemed extremely alarming. We had read that cancer patients were being irradiated in a project funded by the DOD and that some had been made “ill” by the radiation. They had had “nausea and vomiting” afterward, and the writer questioned whether or not they knew they were part of an experiment, and whether this kind of radiation could reasonably be considered “treatment,” even of an experimental kind.⁴

We had thought about this for a time, and we began to feel we ought at least to look into the matter. We reasoned that, after all, this was our university, and that all of us working there were responsible for what took place and accountable to the citizens of our town who paid our salaries. Surely, we felt, we ought not to have to rely on reporters outside to tell us what was happening; we ourselves should find out and let people know.

That may sound like perfectly straightforward thinking and just common sense, but of course within universities, and most other institutions, such an attitude is regarded as provocative in the extreme, and above all unprofessional. Nothing is worse than snooping about in your colleagues’ activities, in work that is none of your business, especially in departments or colleges other than your own, where—this reasoning goes—you can’t possibly understand what is taking place.

ONE DAY, NEVERTHELESS, I had gone over to the medical school looking for information about the DOD project. I had very little to go on but the account in the *Village Voice*. I met with the director of the medical center, Edward Gall, a large, shy, diffident man with crew-cut gray hair. I recall that in spite of what he told me that day I rather liked Dr. Gall and that later I even regarded him as a little bit of a hero because he had eventually caved in and given us the doctors’ reports.

But what Gall told me, confidentially, that first day, was that he did

not feel he had the right to ask the researchers to give him copies of their work for outsiders, and that—besides—these were scientific documents, and English professors would not be able to make head or tail of them. And after all, he said, they were bulky, extensive papers—surely no one would want them all. “We do, though,” I remember saying. “We would like to see them all, Dr. Gall.” He would look into the matter, he said.

I bided my time. I went back several times and used several different arguments on Dr. Gall. “We don’t know whether the reports we’ve heard about these experiments have any truth in them,” I would say. “We certainly hope they don’t, Dr. Gall. We assume they don’t. We certainly assume that researchers in your college would not do anything that was not in the best interest of their patients.” But people outside were discussing our affairs, I pointed out, and seemed to think we were up to something, so I wondered if some faculty organization should look into the matter and possibly clear it up. He would do what he could, he said.

One afternoon I drove over from main campus to the College of Medicine to call once more on Edward Gall. When I walked in, I saw a stack of documents on his desk, and that day he simply handed over to me the doctors’ reports to the DOD. He said, “Here they are if you really want them.” I was surprised, and I thought, “I wonder if I can read this work.” I later wondered, and I still wonder, why Gall gave these papers to me, or the research team agreed to it—if in fact they *did* agree—considering the profoundly serious things they described.

Gall handed me that day about six hundred pages of double-spaced transcript in several dark brown folders.

These were the papers I would study over the holidays that year and on which I would base my report for the Junior Faculty Association, but that first day I drove back to main campus and parked way up on the round drive in front of my home building, McMicken Hall. I was so anxious to see what I had that I pushed my car seat back and opened the folders onto my lap. Once I began to read, I read and read and could not stop, and I forgot everything else; when I finally got out of the car, I remember that it was as if I hardly recognized the drive I was parked on or knew where I was.

I looked away at the sloping lawn of green stretching way down to

the city street below, and it was as if I did not know that I had ever seen it before. I felt very, very odd and everything around me looked new and strange to me. The red bricks, the white tower, of McMicken Hall looked strange and as if I had never encountered them before.

I realized I did not know much about things. I had grown up in a small town in Georgia among uneducated people who knew nothing of the world. My mother and father had never seen a university; it was a concept that meant nothing to us. My mother had taken a business course and gone to work as a secretary in our one office building so I could go to college, and I went to a country college only a few hours away, where still the wider world only barely peeped through; and though of course I read about things, and read, for instance, about life in universities, it was not the same as knowing about them. Then I myself had gone to a university in Georgia, and then to another one in the midwest; at Indiana University I had earned a doctorate degree (what a fine thing to do!), and yet it seemed that it was only then, reading what I was reading in my car on the drive that day, that I began fully to understand what universities are and that there may be no reason to admire or respect a university, that universities do not necessarily intend any good to the human race.

Now I had not been present in those narrow chambers into which the sick people I had read about had been rolled to be irradiated. I had not seen the attendants composing their limbs and adjusting the dials and beams. I had not seen all that—and it is strange to think that during some of those years I had been getting in and out of my car on McMicken Drive, just as I was on this day when I was reading about those lives. Yet what had happened I felt touched me directly. I was a teacher in the same university, this was my university, and around the corner of McMicken Hall I could see the towers of the hospital buildings where these events had taken place.

I recall that when I did get out of my car that afternoon, I walked around the corner of the hall where I worked to look over the cityscape of hills and glassy peaks toward the medical towers across the way. I gazed at them in confusion for a long time, and I remember pacing slowly back and forth on the walk, thinking rather chaotically, no doubt, about the awesome things I had been reading about.

It seemed to me then, and it seems to me now, that we had become

a secret slaughterhouse, we had become a death camp. The doctors appended to each of their annual reports profiles for each person exposed, and I could readily see, that first day, that one patient had died six days after radiation, and others on day seven, day nine, day ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-two, and so on. In the winter and spring of 1969, all but one of the seven patients used in the tests had been given the higher doses of radiation and had died shortly afterwards.

In this 1969 brigade, a woman of eighty—whom we knew then only as “M. B.,” case number 090—had, like certain other individuals, been experimented on *twice*: not just with a total body exposure of 150 rads, roughly the equivalent of three or four hundred mammograms, but with an operation to remove bone marrow from her chest for later reinfusion—in a crude attempt to keep her blood from being destroyed by radiation. It was she who had died on the sixth day after exposure, of a stroke related to the anesthesia for her bone marrow operation, the shortest survivor of all. Today we know her family and that she was an African American schoolteacher in Hillsboro, Ohio, named Margaret Bacon, and was not acutely ill when she entered the hospital that spring for tests.

I assume that I went in that day to teach my afternoon class, but of course I don’t remember the class, and I expect it passed for me in a rather dreamlike way.

I had been learning about radiation, and as it turned out I could read well enough the doctors’ reports and their case histories. I knew what radiation death was, and in fact, if you are not a medical investigator trying desperately to camouflage and cover up a rite of human sacrifice, such deaths are not difficult to explain. I assume that children are taught about radiation injury in science class or in the study of the U.S. nuclear attacks on Japan at the end of World War II.

The report I went on to write, over that December, was to spell out the details of the eleven years of these tests. It spared nothing. It told the simple truth about these citizens’ lives and deaths. Yet it also looked at every possible way in which the doctors could attempt to justify what had been done. The record it compiled was accurate, and though it has been hidden and suppressed, mocked and reproved by the researchers and their coconspirators in every way these things can be done, the facts that it records have never been replied to by these investigators, and

the point is—they cannot be replied to; and that is why so very few of the researchers have ever spoken of these matters to the public at large, and why we had, in time, a lawsuit and a settlement for the surviving families.

The report I have been speaking of, seven typescript pages addressed originally to “the campus community,” told people that there had been no consent forms of any kind for the first five years of the project, and that according to the doctors themselves the patients were told simply that they were being treated for their disease. “The patient is told that he is to receive treatment to help his sickness,” says the first report to the DOD in 1961; and the report for 1963 puts it this way: “The patient is told that he is to receive treatment for his disease.” In the 1963 report the doctors say that having now irradiated eighteen people, they are totting up the scores on people’s deaths, calculating, they say, in their matter-of-fact, textlike language, with the chill of the sterile laboratory about it, the “importance of radiation in precipitating demise.” In 1966 they matter-of-factly refer to the “severe hematologic depression”—the damage, that is, to blood cells—they have found “in most patients who expired.”

The report we issued also registered these crucial facts: that when the project began, no design could be discovered for a study of cancer, and that no patient had been irradiated before the start-up of funds from the DOD for the study of radiation sickness. There was not a single extended publication by the doctors on wide field radiation as cancer treatment during the eleven years of the project, but on radiation injury we found a long series of papers and publications. One could say this, I believe: there were so many smoking guns left behind in these original papers for the DOD that one could hardly make out the papers through the smoke that enveloped them.⁵

THE PRESS CONFERENCE of the Junior Faculty Association in 1972 was held one winter afternoon in the UC student union. Not many people came. After all, no one in Cincinnati could have expected so somber a tale. A year later, one of the doctors, Edward Silberstein, wrote me the only letter—a very brief one—I have received from the team of investigators since the day we released our report. Beforehand Silberstein had been cordial enough and had granted me an interview down

in the basement corridors where those specially built radiation rooms were located—he had thought, it seems, that cordiality was all that was required—but in his note to me afterwards, Silberstein attached a letter announcing that the radiation team’s colleagues at the University of Texas had awarded them a prize for their work on whole body radiation, and he signed his note to me, penned on December 24, 1973, *Yours for bigger and better press conferences*.

Indeed our report had been almost completely suppressed in Cincinnati, where of course it would have posed the grave danger to the researchers of alerting victims and their families to what had happened to them. My colleague in the political science department, Henry Anna, had arranged for publicity, and a television team had appeared in town from CBS, to cover our press conference, but that afternoon, just as the team was finishing up a film on the experiments for that night’s evening news, a fire broke out at a nearby nursing home; the team dropped the radiation story like a shot and rushed to the site of the fire. The news that night was of fire, not of the deliberate exposures by our government. (And so it goes, all too often, with American journalism.)

Still, a stringer from the *Washington Post* did come to hear us that day and to carry away a copy of our paper, and the tale we told was printed almost entire the next morning by the *Post* and then entered into the *Congressional Record* by Senator Edward Kennedy. A number of other papers followed suit, and for a day, at least, some knowledge of the Cincinnati tests winked through the heavy ether of the normal daily news of natural disasters, official government releases, interesting crimes, and so on.

Kennedy was preparing for hearings on medical experimentation around the country, had become interested in the UC case, and was making a strong effort to force the College of Medicine to let his staff interview their subjects. We know now, in fact, that a great deal of the adrenalin pouring off the doctors’ desks during those early months of somewhat scattered publicity in 1971 and ’72 was directed at blocking this most hazardous of all moves against them—the gaining by anyone of direct access to living victims of the tests or their families.

From the day of the JFA press conference, Kennedy’s aide Ellis Mottur was in daily contact with us—there seemed to be the feeling on his part that these doctors had been penned irrevocably in a very tight corral by

our report. “Do you *believe* what we have said?” I remember asking him. Did his office regard our findings as an accurate measure of what had taken place? Mottur said that the Kennedy office had determined that we were more than credible. “We have sent the JFA report out to our medical sources and they have told us that it makes a very damaging case against these doctors.”

But that is not politics, is it? After our report, the medical school doubled its efforts to block access to the patients and privately hired special counsel in Washington to fortify the legal wall between patients and potential interviewers. Silberstein and Eugene Saenger, the lead investigators, constantly urged noncompliance with all such requests and claimed ever-mounting evidence that the patients themselves did not want to be known.⁶

The school stepped up its efforts with their political friends to get them off what was now a very sharp hook. Why not get the various “liberals” together, they reasoned, including the new progressive president of the university, Warren Bennis, and talk sense to them about this unfortunate affair? Would it make sense to punish the entire medical school and all the local citizens it served because of the poor judgment of a few doctors in accepting money for their work from the U.S. military—their only misdeed? In time Bennis met with Kennedy and with Kennedy’s fellow liberal and friend, Ohio governor John Gilligan, and the three of them made a pact: Kennedy would agree to no interviews with patients and no congressional investigation into the basement chambers, in exchange for the halting of the project by UC, or at least the refusal of any further funds from the DOD.⁷

This is how it came to pass that the Cincinnati case was slipped, finally, very softly away into a deep secret drawer of history . . . meant never to be opened again. The rest would be silence.

And indeed no word was spoken of those subterranean chambers at UC in the congressional hearings that followed on human experimentation as it existed at that time in these United States.

New subjects had ceased to be irradiated, and this was, of course, a major victory. Lives would be saved. It was not a full resolution, but those of us who had fought the tests had to be content with that. The Cincinnati papers would not print any of the facts we had outlined about patient deaths, or anything from the individual case histories, so the

victims and their families had no way of knowing what had happened to them. At that time, a small number of victims did, in fact, still live, but the UC College of Medicine was not compelled to notify them that they had been used as human guinea pigs.

The team of doctors lost their project and their funds, and that was bitter for them indeed, as we shall see, but beyond that, they paid no price for what had been done, were not investigated by a congressional committee, by the local Academy of Medicine, or by the state medical board.

EARLIER THAT SAME FALL, the anguished interest of Senator Mike Gravel had been evoked by the work on Cincinnati by Roger Rapoport, and when the Junior Faculty report was issued in January, Gravel became the only elected official who would write to us. In a letter I received from him on February 2, 1972, he said, "It is clearer and clearer to me that life is not held sacred in this country; it is cheap." Dr. Saenger's experiments, he went on, "seem to be a symptom of a very much larger barbarism."

Gravel had asked the American College of Radiology to examine the UC project for him, but he had been deeply dissatisfied with the clearly unserious report he had been sent. He said it was "evasive, disorganized, and deficient in almost every piece of relevant information," and that the report by the JFA was "extremely well-organized and to-the-point." But it is easier, after all, to bring forth the simple truth than to invent an elaborate disguise for that truth.

In March of that year, Gravel asked once more for information from the ACR and they ignored him this time completely. "It does not surprise me," he said on March 14 to a publication called *Drug Research Reports*, and then he made a prophetic statement: "I believe in due time, Dr. Saenger will have to answer all these questions and more."⁸

That time was indeed to arrive in the winter of 1994.

IN 1972 A HANDFUL of medical writers and other researchers got in touch with us and studied our report. Our findings held up. We know now that there was a time early on when the founder of the project, Eugene Saenger, had wanted badly to respond to us, but that his friends in medicine had advised him not to do so. Then in 1975 he and Edward

Silberstein authored an article—never to be published—titled “Ethics on Trial: Medical, Congressional and Journalistic,” in which they struck out at their critics in the press and in Congress, but as the *Cincinnati Enquirer* would observe in 1994, “saved their sharpest comments” for the JFA.

“On adding up the result of the multiple investigations,” they wrote, “the only unfavorable comments had come from a handful of local, and non-medical junior faculty members.” In a related letter, a friend of the team in La Jolla, California, Dr. William Crosby of the Scripps Clinic, wrote Edward Silberstein that the charges of the JFA were “ridiculous” and that he had been “on the receiving end of one custard pie after another, pitched by a pack of sly, self-seeking, savage clowns.”⁹

During all those blanketed years, the UC College of Medicine never acknowledged any wrongdoing, and the cover-up was assisted strenuously by the local press and politicians.

Thus the full names of the victims were never known. We had only their initials . . . and our guilty knowledge of the way in which they had passed from the earth, these Cold War warriors who did not know they *were* warriors, this invisible army, as I came in time to think of them, that fought by night—that is, in ignorance of all that was taking place and the battle being waged over their lives and deaths.

1994 and a Secret Drawer Reopened

This is not just evil . . . it is beyond evil.—ELISE FELDSTRUP
of the radiation of her mother, Rose Strohm, case study #107.

Years went by and I expected to hear no more of this affair; I went on with my teaching and writing and with other forms of political work, and in time it came to pass that most of the people who knew me did not know I had ever been involved in such a campaign. The records I had acquired rested for years in an old rusty filing cabinet down in my basement.

Still, what I knew to have taken place, in my own university, would always be a sore wound in my memory. It would affect all my thinking about my profession and every other profession, and as these memories mixed and moiled about in my mind with many other apperceptions about the way we live in the United States, they led me to feel that it takes an enormous nerve for a society like ours to try to convince itself that it has arrived at true “democracy.” *If we say we are trying to build a democracy—I would sometimes reflect—that is another matter; let us hope we are still trying to do such a thing.*

But what is important is that in the winter of 1994, twenty-two years after the events I have described, the grave of all this history suddenly opened again.

In November a tiny woman reporter in Albuquerque with amazing enterprise and nerve had succeeded in finding families of people who