

our papers. As we were leaving, I turned to Mrs. Ellis and thanked her for telling us about the monkey laboratory. I realized she had told us information that we would not hear through normal channels. She accepted my comment and added a few of her own, expressing her personal bewilderment over the people calling the shots. Her frustrations were not hard to see.

Then the other student said solemnly, “This is pretty serious stuff you’re talking about ... the government, contaminated vaccines and the possibility of epidemics in the future. Don’t you think *it’s dangerous* to be talking about this?”

“Oh, they can’t hurt me,” she chuckled at him.

“Well, that’s not exactly what I meant,” the other boy said apologetically. “Do you think you should be *telling us* about these things?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” she said in a snap. Then lowering her head to study both of us over the rim of her glasses, she concluded:

“This is going to be your country soon, and you are the ones that are going to have to deal with these problems. You have the right to know what they did.”

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1 When the debate quietly raged over the contamination of the polio vaccine with monkey viruses, it focused on one virus, SV-40, a DNA virus that produced pathogenic results fairly quickly. NCI eventually claimed that SV-40 was not a significant threat to humans, and declared the debate over. But the reason that SV-40 was named “SV-40” was to remind us that there were 39 other monkey viruses already identified.

What about all the other monkey viruses in the polio vaccine, especially the slow acting retroviruses which can take decades to produce disease. These retroviruses baffled the scientists of the 1960s, but today we understand how they breed by inserting themselves into the genetic material of other cells. In 1994 Dr. Michael McGrath, a medical researcher from San Francisco, demonstrated that retroviruses can cause cancer *directly*, by invading a cell’s genetic material and triggering the cancer process, rather than only causing cancer indirectly through the suppression of the immune system, as previously believed; Associated Press, “AIDS virus can cause cancer,” *St. Petersburg Times*, April 8, 1994, p. 8A. Look at the cancer statistics presented in Chapter 9 and decide for yourself if there might have been a problem, even if honest scientists are not yet able to explain it.

2 I never knew her first name. When we wanted to be familiar, we called her “Mrs. E.”