

Take Back the Earth –
The Dumb, Greedy
Incompetents
Have Trashed It

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Swiatek Press

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First Edition

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Published by Swiatek Press, Inc.
71 Georgian Lane #3
Buffalo, NY 14221

ISBN: 0-9817843-1-3

Printed in the United States

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This book is dedicated to the people of Bellevue,
Love Canal, Rocky Flats and all the other areas
where corporations and the government have
polluted the land, water and air and caused sickness
and death to the inhabitants of those communities.

also by Robert S. Swiatek

*The Read My Lips Cookbook:
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Don't Bet On It – a novel

*Tick Tock, Don't Stop:
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for seeing eye dogs only

*This Page Intentionally Left Blank
– Just Like the Paychecks of the Workers*

*I Don't Want to be a Pirate – Writer, maybe
wake up – it's time for your sleeping pill*

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Introduction

Over the last hundred years, many inventions and innovations have been introduced to simplify our lives. The washboard and basin were replaced by the washing machine, making laundry a great deal easier. The horse gave way to the automobile, and the refrigerator, with its freezer compartment, made iceboxes obsolete. Radio was not eliminated but television made a permanent appearance that changed all our lives. Soon we had color TV, cable, the VCR, satellite dishes, DVD players and more recently, high definition television. The movie theater is still as strong as ever despite the introduction of home movies by way of cable, the videocassette and the DVD. The slide rule was made obsolete by the calculator, which is still around but seems to be giving way to the personal computer. Some people still read newspapers in the same way our great grandparents did, while many now peruse them online, through the Internet. The telephone has evolved into the cell phone and we now have phone messages, call waiting, caller ID, caller ID block, call forwarding and teleconferencing.

These are just a handful of the advances. It would take volumes to cover all of the other creations. Some are timesavers and are appreciated, but most likely, we would be better off without the others. Some have disrupted family life, and others have created zombies out of normal people. People can't live without some of them, but these products weren't around a decade ago and yet humanity survived. The majority of people claim they can't live without the cell phone, while at the same time over fifty percent surveyed said that this is one item which should never have been created.

A great many of the innovations have had or will soon have a devastating effect on the planet. At one time the automobile was a luxury, but Henry Ford changed that so that just about anyone could own a car. This progressed to

the point where many people now own a few, even though you can only drive one at a time, and these people aren't car collectors. Thanks to vehicles on the highway, the hole in the ozone layer has gotten larger and global warming is a very serious threat to the planet. Without the auto, many wars could have been avoided, specifically in the Middle East. Not all that the automobile has done for society has been good.

Besides the innovations and in many cases because of them, we have heard about the atom bomb, the Exxon Valdez, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Bhopal, Cancer Alley, Love Canal and 9/11. An accident such as what occurred at the nuclear installation in eastern Pennsylvania should have been a lesson for others in the industry, but apparently it wasn't, since an even larger disaster occurred at Chernobyl. The earth is very resilient, but after a while, there's just so much it can tolerate.

The oil spill off the coast of Alaska was repeated in the year 2004 and there will be more spills in the future. Lois Marie Gibbs struggled in her home in Niagara Falls over a quarter century ago, but towns all over the world now have their own Love Canals to deal with, some even more disastrous. When it comes to the environment, people who don't learn from history have a good chance of getting sued.

The last one hundred years have witnessed two World Wars, the Korean War, Vietnam, multiple wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and many not as significant but still devastatingly harmful encounters between nations and even within countries. There is no greater danger to the planet than the endless wars that are used as a way of settling differences.

Something needs to be done to save the earth. We really can't put it off until tomorrow. Rachel Carson talked about just this issue in her book, *Silent Spring*, which was published almost a half century ago. Few if any people listened to her warning. Living in an area that has become a

dumping ground for all kinds of toxic wastes, I was inspired to write this work. It gets into some of the environmental disasters of our time, specifically war and industrial pollution. Suggestions are made to make the planet a better place for humans to live. The book is intentionally not a long one, as I want to get as many people to read it as possible.

Corporations have to realize that it is not in their best interest to create some of the products they do. They must also see that it does them no good to dump their poisonous wastes with the hope that no one will bring a lawsuit against them. At the same time, we the citizens of the world need to pitch in and do our part. You may think that your small contribution won't be significant or make any difference, but it will. If we all work together, we can "Take Back The Earth."

1. Oh, say, can you see

If it weren't for one invention – gunpowder and all its *derivatives* – I wouldn't be writing this chapter. That last word is a Wall Street word, and not a good one, as far as I am concerned. However, canon balls, bullets, bombs and mortars aren't welcome, either.

You may object on the basis that we all have a right to bear arms. That may be true, but there is no right, that I know of, that says you can drop a bomb or two on a belligerent nation to save lives. Where does a leader get the right to attack a country and bomb it based on the fear or suspicion that the latter just might attack the aggressor? With that attitude, there won't be any people left, nor will there be a planet in which anything could survive. Pre-emptive attacks might indicate that the person who thought it up has an empty brain.

When Washington, Jefferson and Adams wrote documents that succeeding generations would abide by, I'm sure it was with the understanding that an adequate interpretation to account for the times had to be considered. Common sense should not be tossed out the window.

I should talk about “What if?” That phrase was a part of a campaign by one of the large American banks a few years ago. I even worked two contracts as a software consultant for that wonderful bank some time ago. I could ask, “What if corporate America cared for their employees and adequately compensated them for their efforts rather than downsizing the workforce and outsourcing jobs, because of greed?”

“What if executives acted ethically rather than opting for some of the practices and results of a few banks and companies such as Global Crossing, Enron, Adelphia and Arthur Anderson, for starters?” I could go on but I will let you think about some of the possibilities that we could be experiencing today had gunpowder not been invented.

People could still club and beat you or stab you with a knife, but you certainly would have a better chance for survival. I will admit that you do have a chance to get away when the shooter is reloading.

Of the worst innovations of all time, a few of them actually had great potential and could have been very beneficial to mankind. In my opinion, the ultimate worst descendant of gunpowder – it had some value – has to be the bomb. This includes the atom bomb, neutron bomb, hydrogen bomb and any weapon that can inflict damage on human beings and the land, water and air. You can read more about the process of bomb creation in ***Making a Real Killing*** by Len Ackland. I'd advise you not to read it before sitting down to eat, unless you've never had a problem at the dinner table, even when times are difficult.

With World War II in full swing, the Manhattan Project began in 1942. It was so named after the borough in New York City where its offices were located. Its aim was to create a weapon that could be used in war to effect victory. A group of scientists and physicists secretly gathered in Los Alamos, New Mexico and began work on their project, the atom bomb. They succeeded in their mission, but were not successful. If you disagree with that last statement, ask the Japanese and the environment, with both suffering greatly from the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The Manhattan Project officially ended in 1947, but the troubles continued. World War II ended, while a new one began, the Cold War, and the world was rapidly changing. The feeling was that you needed to have an infinite supply of nuclear weapons just to assure your enemies that all the weapons would not be used. In other words, by having them you would never have to use them, and there would never be a nuclear war. However, if you didn't have this arsenal, the world could face annihilation. Remember that the atom bomb was used so that lives would be saved! Both feelings

remind me of the ad that preaches, “The more you spend, the more you save.” Those are all examples of “great” logic.

This prevailing bit of “wisdom” about having these weapons is called “deterrence.” However, wouldn’t the elimination of all nuclear weapons be a more reasonable approach since so many resources could be saved as well as the people and the environment? But that was not the choice that was made. I am not sure what type of thought processes – if any – enabled this decision, but it certainly wasn’t arrived at through the courses I took.

Over a half century ago the result was a handful of weapons plants across the country in such places as the Hanford Reservation in the state of Washington, Oak Ridge in Tennessee, Ellenton, South Carolina, the home of the Savannah River plant and Los Alamos, New Mexico. Each of these facilities helped developed weapons of mass destruction (WMD). If you were to compare these final products to the bombs dropped on Japan during World War II, it would be like comparing a stick of dynamite to a cherry bomb. The power of the new bombs was enormous.

The Korean War began in the early 1950s just after World War II ended. Russia was the new enemy. Hence, there was a need for all these weapons. The government made the decision on the location of the production plants and eventually decided to use an area not far from the city of Denver for one facility. This was done for numerous reasons and the place was sixteen miles northwest of the city in an area called Rocky Flats.

Headlines in the Denver Post on March 23, 1951 read, “U.S. to Build \$45 Million A-Plant Near Denver.” I doubt that the *A* stood for appliances. The area was selected for a variety of reasons and this also meant plenty of high paying jobs and a great boost to the economy of the region. The Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) administered the nuclear enterprise and Dow Chemical was the corporation in charge of operating the plant. This bomb process went on

from 1952 to 1989, and as of 1999 the facility still held 14.2 tons of plutonium.

In the beginning what exactly would be taking place on location was not generally known to the public. All they saw was a great work opportunity and progress, but none of the side effects, which would come later. When representatives of the AEC were asked if bombs were being built at Rocky Flats, they refused to answer on the grounds of national security. In fact the AEC and Dow Chemical put a tight security lid on the whole situation in the area that would go virtually unchallenged for seventeen years.

There was also deception in the early 1940s when medical scientists injected eighteen men and women with plutonium to study its effects on the body. Most of the subjects were not informed of what was happening. It's ironic, but in a way, the same thing was happening to the workers at Rocky Flats even though neither employees nor management realized it, and they were all victims.

Once the site was ready to go, the plants at Rocky Flats began work on part of the process of building high-powered bombs. The end result was not the finished product since this location merely assembled nuclear bomb cores, or pits, from plutonium, uranium and stainless steel components. Other work, some beginning and some finishing, was accomplished elsewhere at different weapons sites. The results were bombs that had much more potential than what were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As might be expected, there were many problems that came up relatively early and some that would appear much later. The first had to do with secrecy. The general public was not aware of what was happening as far as all the details of bomb construction. They didn't know where it was taking place and how many bombs were being produced. The people who knew of the mission were the AEC, Dow Chemical and those in government. However, they did not know of all the details and the danger. In 1995, the U. S.

Department of Energy labeled Rocky Flats the most dangerous weapons plant in the nation because of the health and safety risks.

The laborers doing the actual construction at Rocky Flats knew what they were building but not the extent of what the whole program across the country involved. The philosophy was everyone does his own little job so an individual worker wouldn't see the whole picture. As already mentioned, laborers came to work because of the high paying jobs but little did they know of what was really happening. Some may have speculated on just what they were a part of, but most didn't want to face the reality or else they simply accepted it as work. Some even rationalized that since the finished product was not done at Rocky Flats, they weren't actually creating bombs.

The secrecy factor meant that control was not a concern, nor could it be. Since knowledge was missing or not to be supplied, this meant many things could go wrong. For example, as the plants began production, certain goals were aimed for and met. As time progressed and the Cold War created more tension, people in power decided that production should be increased. This was indicated to the plants although not much else was done relative to how this increase in bomb production was to be accomplished. That is, the feeling was that employees reached their goals before and could do so even if higher numbers were desired. There was no consideration of the fact that maybe the workers stretched to do this and were stressed in the process.

Thus a few new employees were brought on to the scene, but don't forget that this meant training and other considerations. The AEC didn't see those problems and management at Rocky Flats reacted by only thinking of the new goal and not the resultant difficulties. The new output could now be reached but something would have to be sacrificed. This meant that certain safety procedures would be partially ignored and the health of the laborers

compromised. Fire safety, like nuclear waste, took a backseat to production.

Besides the security problem, another major concern had to do with the unknown. The entire process was a relatively new one and much information was lacking. This implied that reactions to problems may not have been correct or no one knew what to do under other new developments. Now add this dimension to the higher production goals and things became more complicated. Security had unknowns related to it but so did the technology working with plutonium.

Plutonium was a mysterious substance, but what was known about it was that it was pyrophoric, that is in some forms it could ignite spontaneously. It wouldn't exactly burn but it could set other material on fire and cause havoc. Rather it glowed like a charcoal briquette but it could burn so intensely that it could melt steel. Extinguishing it was no simple matter. Throwing water at it may have made it more volatile while a normal carbon dioxide fire extinguisher had little if any effect on bringing it under control. Plutonium was dropped into machine oil to put it out and this controlled it on many occasions. There were times when the process of extinguishing the blaze was not that simple. Fires sprang up from time to time, some more devastating than others. Two larger than usual and more consequential fires occurred on September 11, 1957 and Mother's Day, May 11, 1969. The September date – except for the year – would have significance almost half a century later. The latter fire broke all previous records for U.S. industrial accidents with a cleanup cost of \$70.7 million. Both these disasters would have great impact in the years to come.

These outstanding fires eventually led to the closing of the plant, but that was not until 1989. By that time many workers had died or were sick from the effects of being on the job at Rocky Flats. People working in the compound were at great risk due to the health hazards and many

succumbed to chemicals as well as beryllium and plutonium. The surrounding area outside the buildings was said to have acceptable levels of radiation. The only question in that respect is that since there were so many unknowns relative to the entire process, what exactly was a “safe level” of exposure? Needless to say the environment was contaminated but it could have been a great deal worse had those major fires gotten further out of hand.

But there was a still more dangerous problem insofar as byproducts of bomb building were concerned. First of all, what do you do with all the resulting chemicals and everything else that remain? The proposed solution was to ship it to a site in Arco, Idaho and this location received two hundred 55 gallon barrels a month from Rocky Flats during the first year of production, 1954. This amount was to increase throughout the years. Despite that change, with time there was a demand for more bombs, which could only mean more waste, which the Idaho facility couldn't handle. So what then happened to the excess plutonium-contaminated waste?

It turns out that since they couldn't ship it away, they kept it on the premises. Some was in different sized drums outside and some inside, awaiting a better place for permanent storage. Some of the containers were even buried, and eventually the barrels started to corrode. What was even more upsetting was that some of the dangerous waste was poured onto the ground on the premises. Over the years there were some 178 waste sites within the plant's boundaries.

Waste of all sorts was created but no good way to assure that wherever it was stored, it would be safe for generations to come. And yet that is the main problem with spent nuclear waste, whether from a munitions factory or a reactor for generating electric power. Even as early as 1947 the AEC advisory board concluded that radioactive waste presented “the gravest of problems.” Despite this assertion,

they claimed that everything was under control with no consequences!

So the result was a mess of health problems, radiation and contaminated waste, not to mention the bombs that were created. If you create a nuclear weapon and don't use it, you have wasted millions of dollars. If you wind up dropping it on someone, the result is a great deal of devastation and death to humanity as well as to the earth. Building bombs can never result in any good as Hanford, Rocky Flats and Oak Ridge point out. In these cases there are no winners.

Some facts about this bomb building process can be found in Mike Wright's book, *What They Didn't Teach You about the 60s*. These include,

“By 1960, the military budget was \$45.8 billion or 49.7 percent of the entire federal budget.”

That sounds like too much money for defense and the military. There is much more startling news as Wright relates,

“By 1962, the United States had more nuclear bombs than we could ever use: 1500 atomic bombs, more than enough to destroy every major city in the world.

This was the equivalent of ten tons of TNT for every man, woman and child on earth.”

At this time Rocky Flats is closed for production but the cleanup which began was to be completed in either late 2005 or early the next year. I recently heard that it was finished. At the start of the effort, there were speculations on how long it would take but these numbers were unknown, just as there were uncertainties when the process began in the 1950s. In 1995, a DOE study said that it would take 50 years and \$36.6 million to clean up. Energy secretary Federico Pena stated in 1997 that it would take nine years and \$7 billion. Besides these two guesses, there were various other estimates as to completion dates but the reality is that people just didn't know. When the cleanup is “complete,” there will still be doubt relative to any future repercussions.

Even if the media reports that the job is done, don't believe it.

Perhaps the only thing we can say without question is that Rocky Flats should never have been building bombs in the first place. Though the Colorado facility may have had the highest concentration of contamination of all the sites, we can't overlook the fact that it was only one of many scattered throughout the country. Consider yourself fortunate if your state wasn't involved. Nevertheless, you didn't have to travel far to see the danger of building the bomb. Our earth and its people were the ones who suffered.

I was going to summarize that this process of bomb building had two deleterious effects, but in reality the repercussions are many. I use the word *are* rather than *were* because of lasting effects that surround us today. From the narrative you can see that huge resources were wasted in the effort. The planet has a finite number of goods that can be used to create usable products. Creating an atom bomb simply wastes too many of these precious materials. The result is a huge, insane outcome with nothing gained – actually, quite a bit is lost – because of two thoughts: if you use the bomb, you will wreak havoc on the planet. This affects the land, air, water and the people. On the other hand, if that wonderful philosophy of deterrence is applied and the weapons sit in a warehouse, but are not deployed, you still have waste. Simultaneously, disposal becomes a problem at some time.

In bringing about an action using these weapons on a nation, you destroy civilizations – people and their treasures – while also bringing the lasting effects of radiation. The people of Nagasaki and Hiroshima can certainly attest to that. How they could ever forgive the aggressors and forget about what their relatives suffered defies credibility. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that most of the victims have left the earth and only their kin survive. They may not have been directly affected by the dropping of the atomic bombs.

The title of the chapter is the first line of our National Anthem – not one of my favorite songs for two reasons. I am not a professional singer but I have sung in the Liverpool Community Chorus, the Binghamton Symphony and Choral Society and numerous church choirs. I think others will agree that the Star Spangled Banner is too different to sing since it involves more octaves than I care to sing – out of range for most people. In addition, the words, “bombs bursting in air” can be found a bit later. This tends to make the song a war anthem. Maybe it’s time for a new song for our country. I’d prefer an anthem of peace.

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