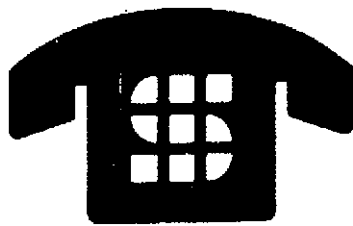


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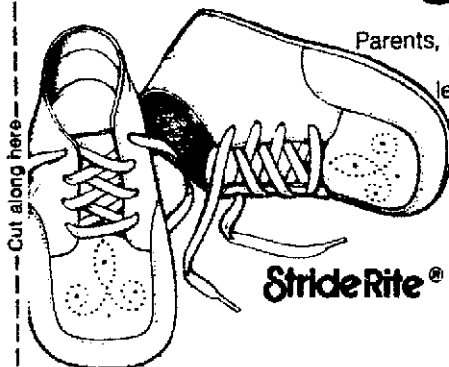


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Short-Circuited by The Establishment

companies have begun marketing the devices. New York Magazine reported in December that Electro-Biology Inc., a New Jersey firm that leases the stimulators, has invested about \$6 billion in the electro-therapy devices.

Why then should Becker, whose research may provide medicine with its greatest weapon since the advent of penicillin, be at odds with the medical establishment?

Becker traces his troubles back to 1973, when the Navy, aware of his work in electro-therapy, asked him to sit on a committee studying the environmental effects of a low-frequency antenna it hoped to build in Wisconsin. After investigating the proposal, called "Project Sanguine," Becker says the committee advised the Navy further studies should be conducted because a large segment of the population might face a "significant risk" from power lines carrying 60 hertz electrical fields, the same frequency as the antenna. Becker claims the Navy buried the committee's report and failed to heed any of its suggestions.

Meanwhile, back in upstate New York, the Power Authority of the State of New York was seeking permission from the Public Service Commission to build a 765-kilovolt transmission line — a million times more powerful than the Navy antenna. After hearing of this, Becker wrote to the PSC, informing the regulatory group of the committee's findings in Wisconsin. Later, he testified at public hearings, urging the PSC to further investigate the biological and ecological effects of the power line before approving the utility's request.

In 1977, he appeared on CBS-TV's "60 Minutes" program and aired his views on both the buried Navy report and the potential effects of low-frequency electrical fields.

"That's when we began losing our research projects," Becker recalls. "When I got involved in the environmental issues — high voltage transmission lines, microwaves and the ever increasing exposure of the population to these modalities — I went public and we lost grants.

"The National Academy of Science was annoyed, the Department of Defense and private defense-related industries wanted our program terminated, and naturally the VA, being a federal agency, appeared to respond to these political pressures."

Becker and his colleagues had received a grant from the National Institute of Health to study the possible correlation between acupuncture and the human body's electrical transmission system. After rocking the boat on the environmental issues, Becker says the NIH suddenly terminated the grant right in the middle of the project.

As funding was shut off left and right, Becker became discouraged. "I was eligible for retirement — I was ready to go up to my cabin and tell them all to go to hell," he recalls with a wry grin.

But instead, he went to Washington, D.C. at the request of California Sen. Alan Cranston, who, along with other elected officials and lobbyists, was interested in the hope Becker's electro-therapy might offer paraplegic veterans suffering from damaged spinal cords. Becker saw the trip as a chance to use his influence to get more NIH research money pumped into the fledgling field of electro-therapy.

"Representatives of the opposition, the Na-



Becker in the lab at Upstate Medical Center.

tional Institute of Health, were there too," Becker explains, "and they told Cranston, 'If you want to support odd-ball research you'll have to give us more money too for our projects.' They were involved in projects, like chemotherapy, that didn't really say anything new."

Becker didn't walk away from the meeting on Capitol Hill with any promises of more money. But his foray into the political world wasn't a complete waste of time. He says it led to an international seminar on regeneration, the first of its kind anywhere, held in Syracuse in 1979. The seminar was sponsored by the VA and supervised by Becker.

But by last spring, Becker realized it was futile to keep fighting for research money.

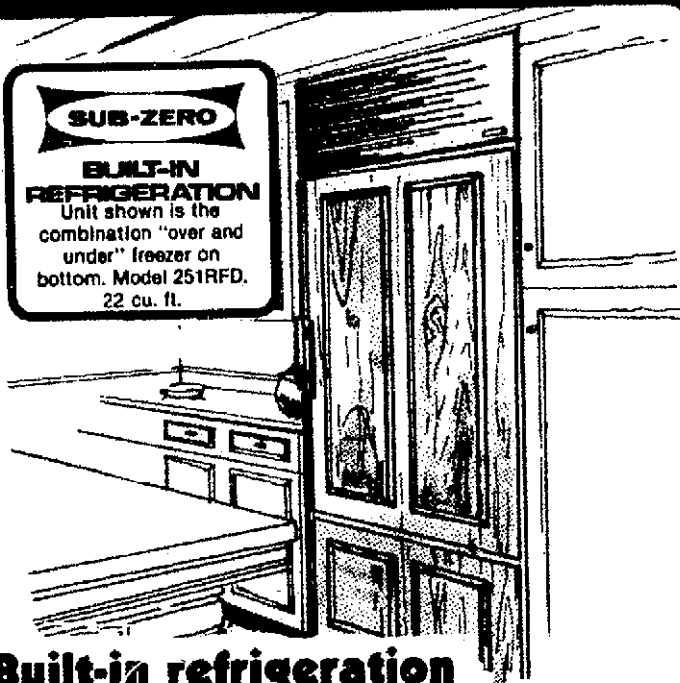
"I had exhausted all the maneuvers that were available to get more funding and I knew our research grant was going to be terminated at the VA, so that's basically why I retired," he says.

On Dec. 19, the VA notified the Orthopedic Research Laboratory, where Becker did most of his work, its last block of federal funding would run out Dec. 31. Since Jan. 1, the lab, for all practical purposes, has been closed. "Literally hundreds of other funding proposals were turned down," says S.M. Appleman, a VA spokesman in Washington. "It would be difficult for me to see how a process like this could be vindictive." But as another VA official in Washington, who requested anonymity, puts it: "The brass here is made up of a lot of former Navy career men who can really nurse a grudge."

An aide to Sen. Cranston, a member and former chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, claims the VA tends to favor conservative research when it is reviewing funding requests because the risks involved in

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