

# How a family got involved with the government

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WHEN A STRANGE, EERIE snow began falling on the Mitchell ranch during the afternoon of April 17, 1959, the northeast Wyoming family didn't realize what a life-altering event it was to be. This was no ordinary snow, and the repercussions would reverberate for years.

Their unbelievable story and legal ramifications are finally fully detailed in the highly researched and well documented *"The Deadly Snow: A Cold War Memoir"* by local resident and author George Brandsberg.

In one of the handful of newspaper interviews over the years depicting the Mitchell family's travails after that day, this is how mother Laura was quoted in a 1993 article: "It was so unfair. We were common, ordinary people trying to raise a family. We had sheep. We sheared them; that was the wrong thing to do that year. But how could we know that? How could we know what was going to come out of the sky?"

Their sheep and new baby lambs began unexpectedly dying at a quite fast rate despite the family's best efforts less than a month later, "most of the flock was gone," according to Laura. At the same time, the individual family members themselves—Preston, 40, Laura 38, and six children ages one to 17—became ill with a wide range of symptoms.

After nearly 60 years the exact timeline gets a bit fuzzy, but the main items never deviate: unknown strangers eventually come to the farm and encourage Preston to take his family members to a doctor in town.

The Mitchells are convinced "they had been exposed to radiation poisoning caused by nuclear testing done by the U.S. government." And by 1961 they are encouraged to file a lawsuit for damages.

In engaging text, Brandsberg breaks the story down into several significant sections: the family, the doctors, the lawyers, the reporters, and the conclusions he ultimately draws. The author is a native of South Dakota who retired in 2000 from the Communications Department at Kansas State University.

The wealth of research he's completed over nearly the past 20 years is evident in the in-depth biographies of the individual Mitchell family members, which he explicitly cites in some of several appendices at the end of the book.

It's intriguing to learn that the government took four of the Mitchell family members for testing at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) in New Mexico shortly after the case was filed, and how two men in dark suits accompanied them.

When the family decided to go to a restaurant in Albuquerque their “government escorts” quickly herded them back to their hotel room, saying, “Think what a propaganda opportunity this would make for the Russians.”

You’ll not soon forget this never-before-told story of what happened to this all-American family, whose personal lives became ensnared within the secrecy of the United States government during one deadly snow nearly 60 years ago.

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