



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on December 5, 2023

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Lyme Disease: Product of America's Bioweapons Program?

Years prior to the Covid pandemic and the heightened public awareness of risky gain-of-function research, our military and intelligence community were conducting secret bioweapons programs involving insects that could carry deadly pathogens. Investigative journalist and award-winning author Kris Newby uncovered strong circumstantial evidence suggesting that these programs, which took place on American soil, might have caused the outbreak of Lyme disease, a highly unusual and potentially chronic and debilitating condition of which more than half a million cases are reported annually. Newby authored a book titled *Bitten: The Secret History of Lyme Disease and Biological Weapons*, which won three international book awards. She is a former science writer at Stanford University, now serving as communications director of the nonprofit Invisible International.



Veronika Kyrylenko and Kris Newby

Below is the condensed transcript of a November 14 interview of Newby by *The New American* senior editor Veronika Kyrylenko. The full interview, posted two days later, is available at [TheNewAmerican.com](#) under the title "[Kris Newby: Lyme Disease and America's Secret Bioweapons Programs.](#)"

The New American: Let's start with your work as a senior producer on the documentary called *Under Our Skin*, which was a huge success. It premiered in 2009 and was nominated for an Academy Award. It certainly drew a lot of public attention to Lyme disease and dysfunctions within our medical system that you uncovered. Why did you pick up this project, and what was its purpose?

Kris Newby: My husband and I, in 2002, got two tick-borne diseases in Massachusetts, and it almost destroyed our family, we were so ill. And so, after I found the right kind of doctor who knew how to test and treat, I was well enough that I said, "Well, there's massive ignorance and misinformation about how to diagnose and treat this disease." I naïvely thought that if I did a documentary and just put the facts out there, the situation would be fixed. I teamed up with a really talented director in California, Andy Abrahams Wilson. So, we started this five-year journey of trying to shed light on how all these patients with Lyme disease and tick-borne co-infections were being dismissed and going on to get chronically ill.

The tests don't work there. They don't work in the first month for Lyme disease, and they're no better than a coin flip later on. And so those people would go on to get chronic Lyme disease. The other thing



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is that once you have Lyme disease and the medical establishment recommends two to four weeks of doxycycline — a really inexpensive antibiotic — a huge percentage of those people relapse, and they have the same symptoms that come back. Yet the medical establishment won't let doctors re-treat. So, the movie talked about these injustices, and during the course of my research, I discovered for the first time the corruption in the for-profit medical system. I would say it started in 1980 with the Bayh-Dole Act, which let scientific researchers partner with for-profit pharmaceutical companies in the creation of test kits, vaccines, and drugs.

And so that was a tectonic shift in medical research in the U.S., because before, scientific researchers would discover something and rush to publish and share that information with other scientists. So, you have a compounding of knowledge on a new dangerous disease. With the Bayh-Dole Act, all of a sudden, the researchers became partners with Big Pharma and the researchers at the CDC and NIH.

So, they would hide and protect that information because it was intellectual property, and Big Pharma companies wanted to get first to market with it. So, this happened with Lyme disease. And the film focused on the injustices to patients and the corruption of medicine due to the profit motive.

TNA: It appears that your initial interest was patient advocacy and raising public awareness about this tectonic shift in medicine that served Big Pharma at the expense of patients. It was already a major story in itself. Yet in your book, which was published 10 years later, you shifted your focus to the investigation of the potential link between Lyme disease and covert bioweapons programs. What caused this remarkable shift?

Newby: It was an amazing fork in the road because I'd spent five years on this film. I was ready to move on. I had this really good science-writing job at Stanford, and I thought, well, it's time. It's time to move on. I'm better now. I can work. But right when that shift happened, two amazing things happened. One is the discoverer of Lyme disease, Willy Burgdorfer, was interviewed by a documentary filmmaker [Tim Grey]. And in that interview, he said, "Well, yeah, I discovered [an organism causing] Lyme disease. But there was something else there that I covered up." And he implied that he was working on the biological weapons program in the 1950s and 1960s, the bug-borne bioweapons program. So that alone was a big jaw-dropper. But he was old. He had Parkinson's. The interview alone was not proof.

And then another random, serendipitous thing happened. I was at an out-of-state birthday party for family only. There was one non-family member, who happened to be a CIA operative during the Cold War, and he told me that he was involved in a pilot study where they dropped infected ticks on Cuban sugar workers in 1962. Later, I found out it was called Operation Mongoose. And the goal of that was to destroy the sugar crop of Fidel Castro, who was the big bad guy back then.... I had a full-time job, but I felt so strongly during the filming of the documentary, they [the government] were hiding something, so how could I walk away? So, I decided I would take the more difficult path of working full-time and then, at nights, weekends, and vacations, researching this other thing. Because both those sources were sole sources, and you needed more proof that these things really happened or not.

TNA: Willy Burgdorfer is a central figure in your book. What was his role in the bug-borne bioweapons program?

Newby: He was brought over in 1951 to Rocky Mountain Labs in Montana. He served as a contractor for Fort Detrick, Maryland, and that was the headquarters of the biological weapons program. And his job as a contractor was to research possibilities for turning fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes into



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bioweapons.

The goal was, and [in my book] I quote an Army document, ... stuffing dangerous pathogens in those arthropods. They injected the agent directly into the body, so a mask is no protection for a soldier. And [infected arthropods] would remain alive for some time, keeping an area constantly dangerous. So, the military could drop these infected insects covertly in an area that they wanted to take over and attack. And it would weaken the population without destroying buildings. It was quite a diabolical program. But I have to say, the Germans had a program like that. The Russians certainly had a program, and the Japanese in World War II had a program like that. So, after World War II, we realized this was a powerful weapon. So, hey, why don't we use it?



The mastermind: Willy Burgdorfer, the discoverer of Lyme disease, had researched the possibilities for turning fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes into bioweapons during the Cold War. He told Newby that besides the spirochete that he discovered, there were other organisms in ticks that could cause Lyme. (National Institutes of Health)

TNA: What are the key facts that you learned about the bug-borne weapons programs, including key milestones, experiments, and any documented incidents that supported the connection of the outbreaks of Lyme disease to what was happening in the secret labs?

Newby: During my research, I think one of the most shocking things [that I uncovered] was an Army-funded release of radioactive, aggressive lone star ticks in coastal Virginia. That's the U.S. Atlantic bird flyway. So, migrating birds go from South America up through Cuba, the Caribbean, up through North America, up to Canada. So why did this research, funded by the Army, release these lone star ticks? Well, it's part of the mission. [They took] a tick that's really aggressive and that can survive in cold and wet conditions. It can live under water for 80 days. It can live in a freezer for a year, reportedly. So, they would inject these ticks with diseases.

At the beginning of this experiment, which was in the late 1960s, lone star ticks were only in the southern United States. Virginia is on the border of the south and the north. And so, they wanted to see how far those ticks would go if they were released in the wild. They were made radioactive so the Army could trace them with Geiger counters to see how far they went. The problem is that just a year or two after these open-air experiments, uncontrolled lone star ticks were up in ... New York, New Jersey, and established colonies on Long Island. And the problem is that lone star ticks are much more aggressive



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than the deer ticks that were established in those areas. And they have rudimentary eyes, so they can stalk their prey, and they carry a really dangerous disease called Rocky Mountain spotted fever. And Rocky Mountain spotted fever was one of the organisms weaponized by the U.S. during the '60s. So, all of a sudden, people on Long Island, off New York City, started getting sick with spotted fever and dying.

I believe that was a huge driver of the epidemic that we're suffering from now. Lyme disease outbreaks started in the late '60s and really flourished in the '70s after DDT, the pesticide, was banned. So, I think all three of these things were clues that something unusual and man-made happened. And it started around Long Island, and Connecticut.

TNA: How many people do you think were infected during that release in the late 1960s?

Newby: There's no way to tell. It was an emerging disease. In the late '60s, there were three highly unusual tick-borne diseases that all of a sudden appeared at the mouth of the Connecticut River, right across from the Plum Island Animal Research facility that made anti-animal weapons.

TNA: So, were [these ticks] supposed to infect animals first?

Newby: Well, no. We don't know where they came from, but there were three organisms. One is *babesia*, which is a cattle-borne parasite that all of a sudden jumped over to men that could have come from Plum Island. Nobody knows. And then there's the very deadly Rocky Mountain spotted fever [caused by *rickettsia rickettsii* bacteria]. And then there's the new one, what they called Lyme arthritis, which was caused by *Borrelia burgdorferi*, a spirochete. A version of it has been found in Europe forever. It creates an annular rash.

So, the thing that was interesting is that Willy discovered Lyme disease, and all of the disease was blamed on this corkscrew spirochete, *Borrelia burgdorferi*. And later, what he told me was that there were other organisms in the tick that he felt could create this disease that we just labeled Lyme disease.

And he was asked to cover up the one organism that's a relative of the Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and it disappeared forever. So that's what my book reveals: that the discoverer of the disease, the guy who has the most to lose because he was famous for this discovery, was told to cover something up about this discovery. So that's highly suspicious. There are also these uncontrolled tick releases. I have evidence of one. There may be others, but all these documents have been destroyed or classified. They're very hard to get to.

TNA: Please tell us about the sources that you worked with.

Newby: Well, the U.S. bioweapons program, which ran for 20 years [before it was canceled], went from the 1950s when they focused on stuffing these arthropods with diseases. And then they decided it was too hard to control two living organisms, the microbes and the bugs. So, they moved from rudimentary genetic engineering, and in the 1960s, [they started focusing on] mostly aerosolized germs, and they picked germs that could be mass produced in quantity. So, first of all, the program was ultra-secret. And in 1972, when the program was canceled, a lot of documents were torched, burned. But I was fortunate to interview Willy a couple of times, and he donated a bunch of his original lab notebooks and annual reports to Fort Detrick, along with letters that revealed the program. I got to look at those while I was writing the book before they were digitized. And so, I have a very good paper trail of the



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experiments that Willy did and how the development of these weapons progressed.

TNA: Given the seriousness of the allegations in your book, have you received any direct response from government agencies or officials regarding the claims of a bug-borne bioweapons program and its connection to Lyme disease?

Newby: So, the book came out in May of 2019, and we kept it sort of under wraps until it was time to market it, just a few months before. And before people read it, they largely dismissed it as part of the fake-news milieu. And major media totally ghosted the book, as far as reviews go. Then Chris Smith, a congressman from New Jersey, read it. And he was in the middle of the DOD budget [debates]. He said, "This is a very critical, credible book. The allegations are serious. Because it affected so many civilians, we need to investigate the DOD, just like they investigated Agent Orange damage to soldiers and the SHAD [Shipboard Hazard and Defense] experiments." So, then, the book became an international interest and sort of a laughingstock. The government was largely ignoring it.

But then all of a sudden, a *Washington Post* op-ed from a tick-borne disease researcher at Tufts University came out, and it didn't name the title of my book, but it linked to my marketing page. And so, it discredited all these things in the book. And later, I analyzed it, and there were 15 lies, mistruths, or misdirections in it.

And it just killed the sales of my book, and it killed a movie deal based on it, and it was dormant for a while. And lately, it has resurged in popularity because of the allegations of NIH involvement in the development of bioweapons in relation to Covid. So, all of a sudden, like a threshold has been passed, maybe what this woman is saying is true. I had layers of fact-checkers: credible citations, archives, eyewitnesses. It's very credible. And I say exactly what I know and don't know about the bioweapons program. For example, I don't know exactly what the organism is and where it was released. Willy said it was this *rickettsia* related to Rocky Mountain spotted fever. But I was hoping scientists would run with it. And I think that's beginning to happen. But we'll see.

TNA: How have experts in entomology and related fields responded to the hypotheses presented in your book? What kind of feedback have you received from the scientific community, and have you collaborated with any other scientists to validate your findings?

Newby: Well, I don't have a Ph.D. or M.D. degree. I don't have a research bench at the university. So, I haven't had a whole lot of people reach out to me except for the people in the Lyme community who have seen that something is wrong with the research in this field, like there's something they're hiding. But I certainly interviewed a lot of tick-borne disease researchers while I was researching the book. I went to the Rickettsia conference and talked to a lot of people. I talked to the people in the inner circle who published the discovery, and they fact-checked the chapters that were related to them. Now, going forward, I watched scientific literature, and I do believe there's been a response from researchers who are interested in this space.

So, two researchers from Rocky Mountain Lab all of a sudden genetically sequenced the pathogens in a bunch of ticks. And that was a step forward, because, really, what they found out is that there are more pathogens in your average tick than anybody expected. And another two researchers, [Ian] Lipkin and [Rafal] Tokarz at Columbia University, did the same. So, I'm almost certain that the Rocky Mountain Lab people did that sequencing based on my book. I don't know about Columbia, but it's a step forward because the thing about Lyme disease is that it's not just *Borrelia burgdorferi*. Any given tick can



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transmit multiple pathogens, some of which can kill you in 14 days. So, I would say that in the beginning of Willy's discovery, *Borrelia burgdorferi* bacteria was the fall guy. It was a distraction, so people wouldn't look inside the ticks to see what else was there. And now they're looking inside the ticks. So that's a step forward.

TNA: These scientists that looked inside the ticks and sequenced the pathogens that were inside of them, were they able to see whether these pathogens came from nature, or were they genetically engineered like you'd expect a bioweapon to be?

Newby: Let's start with the Lyme disease bacteria. Willy Burgdorfer did not say that it was a bioweapon. But recent [research projects] like one in Utah and one in Canada have sequenced it, and they've written in peer-reviewed scientific papers that there's something unusual about the evolution of the genome of this organism. They said it's mysterious, there's rapid evolution. You see those two words together, and you wonder, "Was there human manipulation?" Now, we do know for sure, and this is in documents, that Willy was taking ticks and mixing viruses and bacteria inside the ticks, attaching them to furry little animals to see what combos of pathogens were deadly or incapacitating. When you combine a virus with a bacteria, there's this thing called transfection, it's crude genetic manipulation. And certainly, what he was doing was a crude gain-of-function [procedure] to create more resilient, virulent pathogens. There are documents to that effect that are undeniable.

I'm hoping that scientists pick up where the book left off, since I'm not a researcher. The thing I would hope they would look into is the genome of *Borrelia burgdorferi* to see if it has been manipulated by man. I hope they do that. And this is really important because if an organism has been modified by man, either Covid or early *burgdorferi*, you treat that disease differently than the way it has traditionally been treated. And the main point of my book is, let's look inside the ticks, find out what's there, and let's declassify the documents that will tell us what ticks and what organisms were released in what areas so we know how to treat local disease. We don't have to hire tick draggers with sheets on poles to cover the whole United States to figure this out. It'll save research dollars, and it'll save lives.

TNA: I get it. It was the Cold War, with intelligence and the military wielding enormous power over life and death on this very planet. But releasing weaponized bugs or letting these bugs escape from the secret labs and infect Americans with new diseases that nobody knew how to diagnose, let alone treat, was beyond irresponsible to me. Were there any mechanisms put in place to ensure oversight and accountability for these bioweapons programs?

Newby: Not in the Cold War. It was all compartmentalized, "need-to-know." It was "the ends justify the means" for the Pentagon planners because of the communist threat. There have been attempts since the Cold War to put layers of security in place. But one thing that's happened is that, especially after 9/11 and the anthrax attacks, there's a record number of level 3 and level 4 biolabs established in the United States and outside of the United States that are doing dangerous research.

And some of them have spotty safety records, and it is impossible to have oversight in all those labs. So, the chances of an accident go way up. Anyone who wants to be terrified should read Allison Young's book *Pandora's Gamble*, because she's been covering for decades the proliferation of these bio-level labs. And then, I think again, we have this profiteering in the medical system where NIH is a partner with the vaccine developers, and all of a sudden you can't get a hold of the information on how much the NIH and CDC people have been paid by pharma to support a certain drug or vaccine or fast-track



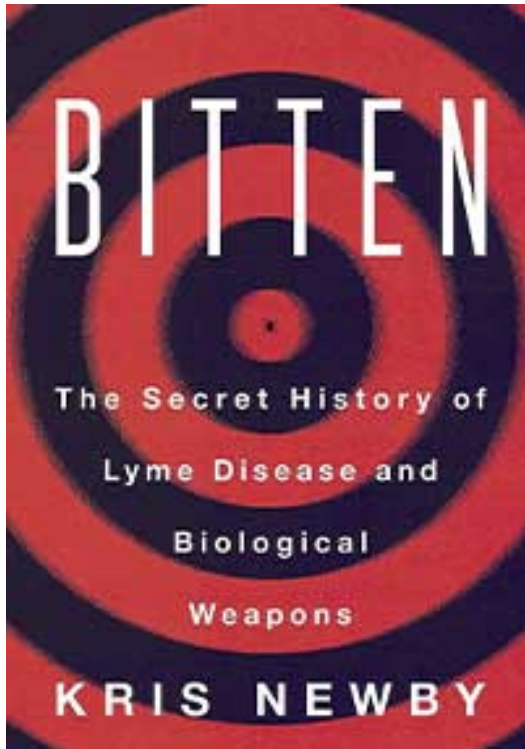
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through the FDA process.

So, we just desperately need transparency so we can see where the conflicts are and pull those weeds out.

TNA: In 1972, the United States signed the Biological Weapons Convention. There are various regulations and oversight mechanisms in place to monitor and regulate research involving potentially dangerous pathogens to prevent accidents or intentional releases. Are we safer now?



Newby: I don't know. I don't think so. I think the way we [and the world] handled the pandemic this time around was very similar to the way they handled it with Lyme disease, where they're emphasizing the vaccines and not the cures or early treatments. And prevention is a disaster. And I hope we learn from those mistakes. I personally don't feel safer because CRISPR, which is the cut-and-paste of genomes, is available to many, many more people. And it's the ability to create Franken-germs and monster pandemics like never before. So, I do feel like we need more oversight, more transparency, more regulations, and fewer level 4 biolabs.

TNA: Are there any indications, or have you uncovered any evidence, that these labs are still operational and working on something like new germs?

Newby: Not in America. I feel like they are honoring that [convention] in spirit. But once you have a flask of a bioweapon and you're working on defense, which is called "dual use," it's relatively easy to switch to offensive. I feel like America is not doing that right now. But again, I have no security clearance, so I don't know.



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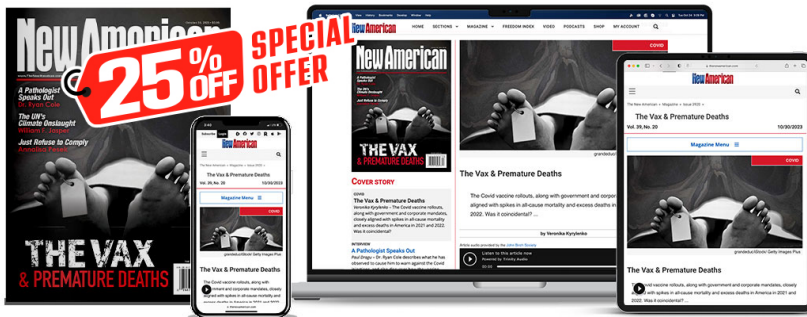
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