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AP Chemistry

Mr. Reed

Samuel Wait's interview proved to be a very touching and thought provoking experience. We did not have many questions planned because we were not quite sure what questions to ask, but as the interview progressed and we became more comfortable with each other, the questions came easily and led to long and detailed responses. The story of Samuel's life and life's work was very interesting not only because I learned more about him as a person, but I also was able to learn more about the time period in which he grew up and the difficulties faced by scientists in his time.

One aspect of the interview that I found very interesting was the fact that the entire city of Schenectady, in which Samuel grew up, was that GE dominated business throughout the city. To quote Samuel, "back then the question wasn't 'Do you work for GE?' it was 'which division?'" This revealed the power that GE had on the city of Schenectady. It reminded me of a video that I watched in Economics class describing a similar situation in Flint, Michigan. GM Motors dominated the business sector and employed over 30,000 people living in the town. When GM left the town suddenly, the town had tens of thousands of extra unemployed people and the local economy and standard of living plummeted, while evictions had increased dramatically. I feared the same thing may have

happened in Schenectady when GE left, but Samuel reassured me that GE had lost its strangle-hold on the local economy years before they left the area.

I also was enlightened about and surprised by the conditions in which Samuel practiced and learned chemistry as a child. I discovered that earlier in the century, school age children weren't receiving adequate information in the classroom. I also learned that to study chemistry, one must do it on their own outside of school. Samuel did just that. He would buy a variety of chemicals from the local pharmacy. He knew little about most of these chemicals but would experiment with them with little regard to personal safety. In a few attempts to create complex organic molecules, toxic fumes were released from Samuel's oven, or trapped in his basement where he worked most often.

I truly enjoyed and learned a great deal from the interview with Samuel Wait. It was eye-opening to hear the conditions of the past and what many scientists had to go through to fuel their passion. I realize now that I am very lucky to be able to be studying chemistry in depth in the classroom and in a safe, controlled environment. I owe my ability to do this to the many scientists who risked their own safety and health in the past to create a better future for everyone else.