

This is a reprint of an article written by Aileen Mioko Smith (*formerly Aileen Smith Katagiri*) for the 10th anniversary of the Three Mile Island Accident in 1989.

## Three Mile Island: The People's Testament

Aileen M. Smith

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In the summer of 1979, three months after the Three Mile Island accident, a party of five concerned Japanese traveled to central Pennsylvania to study the incident and its aftermath first hand. It was a personal trip for the two lawyers, a student, a radiation research scientist, and Mitsuru Katagiri, university professor and my husband-to-be. When Mitsuru returned home to Kyoto, he confessed that before he left Japan he thought he had basically understood the accident — a barely averted meltdown catastrophe that quite fortunately had probably released only an insignificant amount of radiation. But as they toured the area, he was surprised by the number of people who reported anomalous occurrences during and after the time of the accident; strange tastes and smells; burning, tingling or reddening of the skin; and changes in the local vegetation, animals and atmosphere. This prompted yet another trip that year.

In August of 1980, I joined my husband on his next trip to the area and have since returned six times, including a 10-month stay in the Middletown area, five miles from the reactor site. These visits are part of a continuing effort to understand the accident and its implications for our common future. I have only just begun.

The passages below are excerpts from home interviews we conducted with approximately 250 TMI area residents over the years, from 1979 to 1988. Our purpose was to learn about the accident directly from the people living nearby. We were especially interested in understanding more about the unusual phenomena they had experienced.

Now, ten years after the accident, these widely reported phenomena are still not officially accepted. According to scientists and the government, since the releases were “negligible” the accident’s effects on the environment and the people of the surrounding area should also be negligible. But ten years of cleaning up the damaged Unit 2 reactor has shown that 45% of the fuel did indeed melt during the accident and 20 tons of it dropped to the reactor floor. In light of these findings, the accident has been entirely reassessed — reassessed, that is, as to what went on *inside* the reactor, but not as to what may have happened *outside* to the surrounding population and environment. Official interest in

understanding what really happened at TMI appears to end at the reactor's perimeter. The government has never even made an effort to reevaluate what the accident may have released to the environment. The interest and effort exerted to learn about the effects to the outside has been virtually non-existent compared to the tremendous interest and effort to learn about and clean up the reactor inside. An accurate accounting of what escaped is in many ways impossible. But by listening to the people of the area and by learning from the immediate environment, we can perhaps get a clearer idea of what actually occurred at TMI and how it continues to affect those who live in the area.

We have thus chosen to publish our findings in an interview format for several reasons — to counteract the peculiar inattention to local residents' views and experiences; to reaffirm the original reason for the existence of journalism; and thereby to demonstrate the possibility, indeed the necessity of lay peoples' participation in the social processes and policies that vitally concern us all.

## **Jim Gutshall, Bainbridge**

*Shell gas station owner*

Interviewed: August 16, 1988

Six-thirty Wednesday morning, I knew about the accident. Long before [it was on] some of the radio or in the newspapers. One of the guys that worked on the island went to work and they turned him around and told him to go home. He said, "What's going on?" and they said, "There was a bad radiation leak sometime last night. And we're not allowing anybody on the island." They said, "If we need ya, we'll call ya."

So he turned around and came back, stopped here to get gas on his way home. It was around 6:30, something like that. Six-thirty, seven. And he told me to fill it up. It was during the gas shortage and we didn't have any regular gas. And I said, "I can't." He says, "Why not?" I said, "I'm out." He said, "Don't you have anything?" I said, "Yeah, I have unleaded and I have high test." He says, "Put it in." I said, "I can't. You got a restrictor in your tank." He said, "Bust it out, I'm getting out of here!" [That's when] I said, "What happened?" He said, "TMI's ready to blow up. They had a bad radiation leak last night. They're gonna probably be evacuating the whole area." So you know, we knew it long before it was on the radio. But what can you do about it?

They announced [the accident] Wednesday. I guess Friday they said about evacuating. I'm not really sure of what day anymore. When they said it's time to move, we moved.

There was a metallic taste. Funny thing is, it was there from three days before they announced [the accident]. So, it must have been that they were leaking it from before.

Monday [March 26th] I had gone for parts. I run from Bainbridge to Columbia for parts and from Bainbridge to Elizabethtown. I never noticed it going toward Elizabethtown. Just down on 441. Like I said, that was three days before they announced any radiation leaks. The taste was strong enough to make ya sick. I mean physically sick. It gagged ya. After you're away from it for a while, [the taste went away]. But it didn't go away instantly. I came past there, I think it was Tuesday afternoon. Tuesday evening maybe 4:00-4:30, something like that. And I got back here and I went out back and puked, I mean it was sickening. It was real strong.

It was coming up 441, when you'd come up the road, you could taste it. Up there around Wickersham Road. And right around the Hoover farm. It must have been that it hit the high spots.

I can't really say anything else other than the metallic taste. My main thing was that taste.

The morning they announced it, it was beautiful. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. Everything was so calm. It was absolutely beautiful.

*[Jim says he would start to taste the metallic taste just in that elevated area between two ridges. And, he never had that metallic taste before the accident or since.]*

## Clair and Ruth Hoover, Bainbridge

*Dairy farmers*

Interviewed: February 21, 1983

*The Hoovers had many problems with their cows and their own health after the accident. This excerpt is limited to the powdery substance they saw on Friday, March 30th, and the taste they had in their mouths when they returned to feed their farm animals on Saturday, March 31st.*

*Clair was also a part-time truck driver, and Ruth worked in a restaurant in Bainbridge part-time.*

CLAIR: Saturday is when we had a taste in our mouth that wasn't pleasant. This was probably about ten o'clock. We realized it when we asked for a glass of milk. My wife just about threw up on it. I drank some of it but not much because it didn't taste good at all. The top of our tongue was kind of burning. I'm not sure if there was anything wrong with the milk. It was probably mainly in our mouth. It was kind of a chalky or powdery, dry taste. It just seemed like you couldn't taste the food that you were eating. It kind of numbed your senses in the mouth.

RUTH: That morning, one of the men that lived with us at the time brought me [that] glass of milk out

from the house. I started to drink it. And I just kind of gave it back. I said, "That milk's spoiled." And then I looked at the milk. There was nothing wrong with the milk. But I had a *bitterness* in my mouth. You know, when you drive past an iron foundry or something, it smells of metal like a grit. That's the taste we had in our mouth. It was like a metallic taste. You couldn't get rid of it. You could brush your teeth or whatever, but you still had it. It was on your lips, I guess. So I knew that something was in the air. [*Ruth says she thinks this because she tasted it only when she licked her lips drinking the milk.*]

We went out to eat, down to a restaurant in Bainbridge and there was just something about the air. It was bitter on your lips. You could taste it. I can't really tell you exactly what it tasted like, but it was definitely something bitter in the air that you were getting. We talked to some people in Goldsboro that said they had like this grit. I think they also had more of the fallout than we did on this side.

CLAIR: We hadn't noticed too much on Wednesday and Thursday. But we weren't out more than we had to. [But] Friday when my wife came back from work, I had a red pick-up truck and she looked out and said, "It's snowing out there." She could see the white flakes against my red pick-up. That would have been Friday right before noon time.

RUTH: The police had driven up and told us to close the restaurant down and get out. Our owner really got upset. He told us all to get out of the restaurant. So we did. When I came out, I'd seen it.

CLAIR: It looked like there had been a bonfire somewhere and there were flakes of burnt paper or something that would have flown up and that were coming back down. They were small, but they were noticeable. They were easily visible. Different people tried to tell us that we didn't [*laughter*], but we saw it then. Up against my red pick-up you could easily see it. It wasn't like you'd look out and see the things coming down real big or anything.

RUTH: It looked like when you burnt paper, but it was *really* fine. It was real small and white. It looked like real fine snow coming down. It was white or grayish. Kind of a grayish-white. All I know is that I saw it. I looked out and it was just like it was snow, but I knew it wasn't snow. I don't think when it was down that you could really see it laying that much. It wasn't like a blinding snow or anything like that. My daughter had stayed home from school that day and I just said to her, "Look at that Ruthie. It looks like fine snow coming down." So I'd seen it in the couple of minutes that it took [us to get home from the restaurant].

When I came back, I was panicked. I wanted to get out of there get my [other] kids. I ran in the house, grabbed the pillows and sleeping bags, and I was out of there in a matter of minutes. I knew enough of what was going on. I wanted the kids out of the area.

[It wasn't until] a day or two later, when I realized what I had seen. But then the people from Three Mile Island came down [later] and said, "No, you didn't see anything. That's all imaginary." But we talked to people across the river. And we started going to meetings. And there's quite a few over on the other side who had also seen the white stuff coming down. There might have been a couple of people on this side of the river [also]. And NRC says, "Anybody who's seen it, they're whackoes. They all imagined it." I said, "Hey, as long as I live, you're *never* going to tell me I didn't see it coming down!" I told my daughter later, "You know, that really scares me that we didn't realize at the time what it was." It just looked like fine powder, like a snow coming down. But from what I understand, it must have been very spotty. We didn't even know that at the time, because when I came from Bainbridge on up, it was coming down. You could see it in the air.

That night we had little red spots on our arms where we didn't have sleeves on. We went to a motel about 35 miles away, near my mom's. We saw on TV that night where they said, "Take a shower if you think you had any exposure to anything. To fallout." I was so scared and I was just glad to be out of there. We never did take a shower until the next morning. I was so emotionally exhausted, all we did that night was just lay there and watch for the news on TV. We talked about it later, that we had little red spots on the arms. We talked to our doctor. He said that it definitely should have been washed immediately. We should have scrubbed it. But, time will tell if anything happens to us.

There was quite a few over in Goldsboro [who said they saw the powdery substance]. There might have been a couple of people on this side of the river [also].

But it was *really* fine. It wasn't as large as paper trash or anything like that. It was real fine.

## **Ella Gladfelter, York**

*Age: late 40's*

Interviewed: August 2, 1988

*Ella was owner of Gladfelter's Store in Zion's View at the time of the TMI accident.*

When that thing happened, the firemen went through and announced that we were to stay indoors, keep the doors and windows closed. My daughter, Theresa [age 14] had just had a tonsillectomy and she was home from school. My brother and his wife were getting out of the area, so they took her with them. They went up to Sunbury. I thought my husband's health went downhill afterward. He had what they called fibrosis of the lung. I don't know how to explain how he deteriorated after this Three Mile Island thing.

You know, they said it couldn't be from the nuclear accident, but when I walked out in back of the store after this thing happened, there was an ash all over everything. A gray, powdery ash. Yet they kept telling me that that couldn't possibly have been from this nuclear accident. Well, where did it come from? I just can't imagine if it wasn't from *that*, what was it from?

It was right after we had the trouble down at Three Mile Island. We lived in an apartment right in the back of the store. It was all over the sidewalks and the back of the house when we went out for her to get in the car. The sidewalk went out the back door and around the garage. The ash was on the sidewalks. I couldn't imagine why it was. Where it came from. It was gray and it was just very, very powdery, very fine. It was more gray than white, what I saw. [But] it wasn't that deep in color.

I knew that it was nothing that was done in Zion's View that caused it. I assumed it was from Three Mile Island. Then everybody said, "It couldn't be, it couldn't be." Well, don't tell me it couldn't be. They don't know what that nuclear stuff's gonna do. All they know is it will kill people. I felt very sorry for the people that lived closer to it.

I've never seen an ash like that before. It made a layer. It made a coating on the sidewalk. A thin coating. I don't know if anybody else experienced it or not. I talked to different people and they say, "Oh, that couldn't have been from that." But who says it can't?

The ash settled down on the East side of the house. [The house faces west.] Now there could have been on the other sides too, but that's where I noticed it because it was on the sidewalk. I didn't pay no attention to it in front of the house. Well, the cars would have blown it away. It was that light, the cars going back and forth would have blown it away there. Running a store, I was really busy. I didn't have a lot of time to go out and inspect anything, really. I never paid attention to anything else. I just swept it off the sidewalks. I wasn't gonna let that stuff be drug in the house. But then I was a lot healthier than I am now.

When you took the broom, it would stir. It would rise up. When you tried to sweep, you had to be easy with the broom or it would fly all over the place. I throwed it in the garbage. I realize now that I should have saved it. But then would I have been putting my family in jeopardy through keeping something like that around? I didn't wanna do that either. I was [just] thinking about cleaning up the mess so it don't get drug in the house. After I swept 'em, I hosed 'em down. I scrubbed those sidewalks. So, you know, there probably wouldn't be anything there anymore. I just wish I had...well, you can't go back and do it over. I wouldn't want to. But this is why I talked to different ones about it. I wondered if they had seen this ash too, you know. If they did, they weren't admitting it.

They didn't tell us about [the accident] Wednesday. I think Thursday was when they first told us about it. The Thursday is when I sent my daughter up the country to my sister. Before they let us know anything, really. The ash was already on the ground then. It could have happened Wednesday night. I stayed inside and kept the doors and windows shut except when they got Theresa out of there. I sent her out of the area the same day they told us to stay indoors and keep the doors and windows closed. I wasn't leaving 'cause I had a store, and that would have meant vandalism.

My husband's dead now. He died in 1983. He was 80. That's why I no longer have the store. (That darn fly!) Now there was different ones ready to sue Three Mile Island. Ready to sue the electric company and this and that. And then different ones said I oughta sue 'em because of my husband's health. [*Swatting a fly*] But my husband's health was bad before the accident and who was I to say that that had anything to do with his declining health. I don't know. It's just a vicious circle. I hope I never have to watch anybody suffer like he did.

## Marie Holowka, Zion's View

*Farmer*

Interviewed: August 12, 1986

*After the TMI accident, Marie was treated for thyroid problems. She was subsequently diagnosed for cancer and has since had several operations and is currently receiving chemotherapy. She lives with her two sisters and brother. The Holowka's have had many animal problems on their farm since the time TMI began operation in 1974. Here Marie talks about the morning of the accident. [The distance from the milk house to the house is a little over 100 feet.]*

I went to the barn around four, four-thirty [in the morning]. We were milking cows. And the barn started to shake. And I heard a rumble like underground. Well, I wouldn't say an earthquake. But it was going like "brrup, brrup, brrup". And then it shook and shook and we didn't hear the big rumbles. But every now and then you could hear a rumbling in the ground. And Paul, my brother, was with me and he says, "That's an earthquake." I said, "Paul, it don't sound like earthquake. Earthquake, it just rattles. But you don't hear the noise, the brrup, brrup." It just [was] like there was boiling water coming underground. And I said, "I think something happened at Three Mile Island." Then we kept on milking.

And Paul left me about six o'clock. He wanted to listen to the radio to hear what was going on, if it was an earthquake or what. And I finished milking cows a little bit after seven. And I came in the milk house and I cleaned it up to get ready for the milk truck. And so, about ten after seven I started for the house, 'cause I've been working since early morning. And I looked outside. *It was so blue! It was so*

*blue!* I couldn't see ten feet ahead of myself! And I got scared.

So I walked out and I'm going to the house. There's a stone walk there. And I fell down, see. But I was scared and I thought, "Well, maybe I stumbled." And I went about twenty feet away from the milk house. That poison gas must have hit me. I tumbled. And then I finally got myself up and I'm goin' in. And I went about forty feet more, and I fell down again. And I said to myself, "Well, this must be poison gas, because I know I didn't stumble. I just collapsed." And I couldn't get up. I'd try to get up and I couldn't get up. I couldn't get no strength to get up. I finally got myself up, and I went towards where those flowers are. Then I fell down [again]. And I said, "Oh, my. Now I really know something happened at Three Mile Island! It must be poison gas." I just fell down. I had no strength to get up. I said, "Must I really die at Three Mile Island?"

And I stayed there and I struggled. Nobody came out of the house to see me or nothing. So, I finally got up after struggling there maybe five minutes or so. I walked to the house. I opened the door. I stumbled into the house. I said to them, "Did you hear anything about Three Mile Island?" They said, "No, we didn't." I said, "You know what happened to me. I fell down three times before I could come to the house." I was just something like a drunk.

We stayed in the house. It was blue. You couldn't see anything or nothing. And we were scared. Everything was blue. Everywhere was blue. Couldn't see the buildings or anything. It was just heavy blue all that time. We closed up our doors. We stuffed rags underneath the door so this wouldn't come in. But I think it was all the way in.

And we stayed there. It was a warm day. It was a hot day. It was so hot. We shut all the windows and all the doors and we stayed inside. And about nine [a.m.] we listened to the local radios. But they wouldn't say anything. They were only playing Dolly Parton's music.

*[It is quite certain that Marie's above account took place on March 28th. However, her account of media coverage on evacuation follows right after, leading to the possibility that this passage may have occurred on Thursday.]*

*Further describing her walk from the milk house to the house:*

You just got to feel funny. You'd just get an awful feeling in your body. Just like a pinching feeling going through you. Like electricity would be going through you. Did you every get pinched with electric fence? That kind of little shocks. All the way through all your body. You could feel it going through your system. And in my nose, and in my mouth. And then you could taste like a copper taste in your mouth. I could taste that. And then I just got to feel so bad. Nothing was biting me, but you just had



that feeling. I just started to get weak. I just got real weak. I thought I was scared. I guess I just folded up and fell over. I couldn't get up. I didn't have no strength to get myself up. Or my brain or something wasn't working. I couldn't get my coordination to get up. I don't really remember if I was conscious or not. I guess I wasn't conscious when I went down, 'cause I don't remember going down, see. And I fell on the stones. I was lucky that I didn't get broken bones.

Nothing like that ever happened to me before or ever since. Nothing.

*[Marie says the blueness, as well as the taste, lasted several days.]*

## **Robert Weber, Mechanicsburg**

*Veterinarian*

Interviewed October and November, 1982

*[The following is compiled from excerpts of interviews by Smith/Katagiri on October 26, 1982, PUC oral testimony, and also from "The People of Three Mile Island" by Robert Del Tredici, Sierra Club Books, 1980.]*

The evidence of trouble came out in sows and sheep and goats when the Three Mile Island thing came to a head. The period in which the following problems occurred was the birthing season of 1979, 1980 and into 1981. We were having stillbirths. Many. In sheep, goats and pigs. This problem spread over about fifteen miles. The fifteen-mile area included a circle north to North Mountain [to Wentzville Road], west almost to Carlisle, and south around to Dover. I just know about this side of the Susquehanna River. It spread as far as fifteen miles, where we would have one lamb be born alive and the other lamb would be stillborn. And the same way with goats, and four or five pigs would be born live, and the rest of the litter would be dead. There were many of them that were to term. We are still running into the problem of stillbirths in sheep and goats and pigs. [Oct. '82] However, I would say it's decreased quite a lot beginning from about the later part of 1981. A certain amount of stillbirths do occur normally with weather changes and drought and all those conditions where they eat other weeds or something else. But the weather experienced during the times these animals were pregnant and gave birth wasn't particularly adverse from what we had the two years before. However, we weren't seeing too much of the stillborn up until the accident. The stillbirth rate increased at that time to at least 10% of all animals being born.

Right after the March 1979 accident at TMI, we had many sows that could not farrow all their pigs. We did, I don't know how many, Cesarean sections on sows with stillborn pigs, say after about June of 1979. This problem with sows occurred during the two farrowing times, which was late spring of 1979

and to not such a great degree in the fall of 1979. Before 1979, I would have about one call for a Cesarean on a sow per year but during those times we had several a month, usually about two a week and that was just an abnormality for me because there aren't that many sows in that area.

The problem of having to do increased C-sections in sows was not encountered in 1980. A different problem occurred that year. The sows were having their pigs, but many of the pigs were born dead. Now, I am not saying that all the sows delivered dead pigs. Not by a long shot. What I am saying is that there were too many that did.

Beginning with the kidding and lambing season of January 1980, we got into a new problem in the sheep and the goats. We were getting sheep and goats which should be ready to deliver their young, but they weren't opening up. They did not dilate. I did about two Cesareans on goats and sheep per week from January 1980 and we ordinarily would only do one or two per year. All the hormones that we used in the past to dilate an animal didn't work. I mean I would give them massive doses, and I left the syringe and the bottle there and let them continue with the injections. Finally, in frustration, I'd say, "Don't wait until the sheep's dead or the lamb's dead. Bring it in, operate."

One of the farms down there, during the spring of 1980, did not have a cow that had a calf natural. He had beef cows and none of those cows had a calf natural. They never got ready to have a calf. In other words, she made no line of milk and she didn't spring up anywhere. It was like she was just going to carry it forever. And so I would start them on hormones, and most of those cows had to be on hormones for quite a while.

Immediately after the accident at TMI, we had many sheep and goats that couldn't get up. Also, we had troubles with sheep just being found dead. Goats just being found dead. That was from immediately after the accident at TMI through that summer of 1979. They'd be adults. Right after the accident, about half a dozen animals or so that were just found dead were taken by the owners to the Department of Agriculture's state laboratory to be checked for radiation, etc. When we looked for a report on these animals, we never got a report. I went over to the lab, and they said if it were ever submitted, that they would have it on file. They could not find records of any of those animals in their files. They claimed they never got the animals. I don't believe this.

Cancer is our big deal now. It is currently our biggest problem and is on the increase. [Oct. '82] We have goats coming down with cancer, we have dogs with cancer, we have mules with cancer, and previous to that time I never saw it. Now they tell me that cancer is common in mules, and they tell me that cancer is common in goats, but prior to the accident I never saw a cancer in a goat. I never saw a cancer in a mule. But since that time, I've had cancers in goats, cancers in mules, cancers in ponies. We had many, *many* cows with cancer. We are finding the cancers in the uterus, the

mammary systems, the lymphatics. Now these people aren't going to want to talk about those cases.

We've had a lot of cancers in dogs lately. We have cancers of the spleen particularly. Cancers of the prostate gland. And Hodgkin's disease. We've had several of those. We've got it all in the files some place. These people, when they give up their dog with cancer, they're very upset. Once, we had two in the same damn day.

Well, I think this — the animal kingdom, their life span is shorter than ours. Now we're seeing an increase of cancers in animals, so what about the people ten years down the road? I just don't have any proof that the accident at Three Mile Island has anything to do with our problem, but, I see this curve. We're going up in the cancer problem. The hormone problem has more or less slowed down. [Oct. '82]

## Robert and Lena Zeigler, York Haven

*Robert 57 yrs., Lena 61 yrs.*

*Farmers*

Interviewed: October 22, 1982

It was about nine o'clock in the morning when I first noticed it. I was out for about five minutes to do the feeding and I could taste this metal taste in my mouth. Did you ever — I do a lot of times been carpentering and I'd put a nail in my mouth to hold it. And you get that metal taste from it. Well, that's the taste I had. Then I pumped water. And I could just feel this tingling in my legs and hands. And the dogs, they wouldn't even come out of the box. They wouldn't come out to eat at all.

And I had around thirty hogs up in the woods in the range. We have them outside, see. They're in the woods, fenced. All that's over them is a shelter, a roof. Well, normally when they hear me pumping water about a hundred feet away, they're all at the fence ready to eat. Well, I didn't hear a sound out of them. I went inside with a stick and I couldn't even run them out. They would not come out at all, *period*. It was for pretty near three days before they come out. Now, the hogs that were in the barn, they didn't have to come out. They ate maybe about half what they actually would eat before.

And that evening, two chickens was dead in the chicken house. Yeah, the same day. The next morning around dinner time there were two or three dead. And it went on for about, I'd say three to four or five days. You'd go up maybe at two or three o'clock and there'd be one laying dead. We lost fourteen chickens altogether in those five days. The chickens were in the chicken house above the wagon shed. There's five windows, and I take two out in the summer for air. We had sixty-eight

chickens [at the time]. When the young ones started to lay, I'd sell my old ones off.

LENA: We never carried out that many in such a short time. The combs and their heads just got, you might say, blue-black. Just the ones that died.

ROBERT: We didn't even know [that morning] that the accident had happened. I would usually do my feeding, then I'd go up and get the paper, up to the store in Newberry. That is where I found it out. About ten o'clock in the morning is when we found it out. *[This was probably either Wednesday March 28th or Thursday March 29th].*

George [had been] up here about seven thirty in the morning. He's the first guy here. He comes up and helps do the feeding. He said, "I just don't feel right. I just feel senseless, like something...tingling." My brother can tell things real quick like that. I didn't think nothing of it because we didn't know anything of [the accident] until I went up.

We had the work done about nine-thirty, ten o'clock. I'd go up and get the paper. They have coffee there. And I'd sit and bat the bull a little bit with them and drink the coffee with the fellows in there. Usually the farmers go in there. And then these guys told me. I didn't know nothing of it. Then I came back and told Lena. They were talking about the same thing that I was. That their legs felt funny and they had a sort of a metal taste in their mouths. They were talking about it and they asked me and I said I had the same experience, that I had this metal taste and I felt tingly up my legs to my hips. Just like needles. You know how when your arms and legs, the circulation [gets blocked]. After I came back from the store I told George, "I tasted that, too." and he said, "I just felt half numb up my legs."

That morning I had been about half way up to the barn when I tasted it and [got] the tingling in my legs. I wasn't outside I'd say maybe five minutes. When I got in the house then it sort of left. And when I went back out to go up to the other barn to help my brother with the feeding, what, it was right back again, which it was that whole day long. For I'd say a day and a half, two days, that taste was in my mouth the whole time I was out. I'd [come in the house], make myself a coffee or drink a glass of milk and naturally it would leave, until I got back outside.

*Around the farm:*

I have two barns on this farm, and we set out a lot of [rain] barrels for water in case of fire. We never use it to feed. Now, I don't know if it was the second or third day. It had rained. Those barrels, they just looked like you'd dumped a jar of mustard in them. The scum. The yellow came on top. It was a yellow scum all the top of the water around the drum. And then it rained two or three days later, and the other drums had the same thing on them. The same thing happened up here in the valley [to] a

very good friend of mine. Every morning, he would have to go out and scrub his watering trough out.

LENA: We have a cistern out there on our back porch, and I always used that water to rinse my clothes when I wash. I would get ready the night before and let the water warm up, especially in cold weather. One morning, it was the same year, I came down and there was like a yellow rim around the rinse tubs. Overnight like that then, that scum had formed. And I didn't think anything of it so I just tried to skim that off, and it was kind of greasy-like. And I just took a cloth and wiped it off and used the water. Well, the next time I went to wash, I had the same darn thing. So I dumped it. We've been carrying water down from the barn for the last three years, ever since that.

ROBERT: And another thing I want to tell you. This patio out here. The very second day it rained. I never in my life seen it before. Where that rained on that patio, it was as purple as that towel there.

LENA: A reddish brown.

ROBERT: Just like you took maybe a spoonful of blood and dumped maybe a quart of water in it. And that went on there for a year or so, wasn't it. It was the same thing every time. You could see it as soon as it rained. It's still not clean. See what I mean. Now here, I had a lifetime roof put on here. It's a sixty pound weight tin. The man told me it was a lifetime guarantee. I could go up there a month after this [accident] happened and just punch holes in my roof. It just ate that roof right up.

LENA: The dogs stayed in their boxes for a long time after [the accident]. They used to be out all the time. It's just been about the last year that they come out and play and carry on.

*[Aileen asked Lena if she felt anything different during the week of the accident.]*

LENA: No. Except that one day I went out and I felt like something burned on my face. Now, whether it was just from the sun or what... It was just like you got close to heat. That was while all this fuss was going on down here on the island. It was just on the [left side of] my face. Just here [on the cheek]. Just a burning sensation. But then, it went away and I didn't notice it after that.

## **Mrs. Robert Deimler, Middletown**

Telephone interview: February 12, 1983

*Mrs. Deimler lives by the railroad tracks that cross 441 south of Middletown, just north of Three Mile Island.*

We had the taste all the time after the accident. For a few weeks it was terrible. It went on for a long time. It was worse at night. It would be in the house. Just recently — a few months ago — I got it again.

There have been no birds since the accident. And, there were birds before the accident. I don't see any robins anymore. It isn't something I noticed as a change right at the time of the accident. The squirrel population didn't seem to change, and I haven't noticed any changes in leaves on trees.

What good will it do talking about it, because they're going to go right ahead, anyway.

## **Betty Farber, Middletown**

*50 years old*

*Nurse*

Interviewed: February 14, 1983

*Betty Farber works at Villa Theresa nursing home in Harrisburg. It is on an elevation. The rest of the time she spends mostly in the area around her home. She says the burning sensation during the week of the accident was the first experience of this kind for her.*

The first time that it really started burning me was late that evening. Because I was listening to the news and they said it had happened that morning. *[From Betty's account of the day, it sounds like this day is most likely Friday, March 30th].*

I was so nervous and I was crying. And I was trying to get hold of my husband. And of course, with the crying and stuff, I was thinking that the burning was because of my nerves. Because I was upset. I had this little rash, like teeny little 'pettikieye' of pimples all over my forehead and down on [both sides of the cheeks]. And I had that on my arms. The first few times that I got it, I got it on the arms too. But now every now and then when they vent, I don't get it on the arms at all. My eyes were all bloodshot. That again too could have been from being upset, because I was crying. My eyes were really burning. I had my air conditioner on. It was awfully hot in here. And then I heard them say stay

indoors and turn your air conditioners off, which I did. And boy, just about roasted. When my husband finally got back home around two, three o'clock I said, "Oh my god! Do you mind your eyes or your face or anything burning? Something's burning my face." He said, "No." He went up and hurried and gave the animals water and feed. I had all this stuff packed, and we went out to my brother's.

That first time I got it, it lasted for several days. It just didn't seem to want to go away. I think it was by the end of the week that I even called Dr. Leaser, my doctor. I went down to him, and that's when he was tellin' me that I was to use a lot of cold water. He said even cold compresses would help. And this did seem to alleviate it for a short time, like ten or fifteen minutes, then it would start all up again. I'd be washin' again and puttin' cold water on. The first time I had it, I had it for quite a few days.

Then all of a sudden, I got up one morning and I just didn't have it. I went to work, worked a couple days and didn't mind it. Then we were here watchin' TV in the evening after supper. I said to Marlin, my husband, "Boy, I don't know. Does your face bother you?" And he said, "No, it doesn't." I said, "Mine is really burning me again. I bet ya they're venting." And he said, "Well, I doubt that after the incident. I doubt they would vent, at least for awhile." I said, "Well, then there still's some of that radiation or somethin' around. My face really bothers me." So I started washin' it again. It was burning me when I went to bed. When I got up in the morning, it wasn't. But then, it would come [again] sometimes. I'd have it for a day or two. It'd just persist and persist. But then it would go away [again]. Off and on like that for a couple years.

When my face burned, I had trouble with the eyes off and on. They would burn. It was almost like someone put some burning material on my eyes, you know, like alcohol or something. It really burnt to the point where I was squinting to see and sometimes I'd put my dark glasses on 'cause it just bothered me that much.

The first couple of times that it happened, I had the burning of the eyes a lot. And up in the nose and in the throat. And just a strange taste. When I get the burning on the face now, I don't always have that taste. Nothin' like that first year right after the accident. 'Cause it was just almost like you...like a metallic type taste almost like, um, if you'd stick a penny in your mouth or something maybe. You'd get like a funny taste in your mouth. And it would burn down in the throat and up in my nose. [*The first year she had the taste almost every time she had the skin burning.*] But now I don't mind that when I get the burning. It's been a long time, I'd say a year at least, since I had that funny taste in my mouth. My husband never experienced that. I'd ask him. And I'd ask my neighbors if they have the burning or anything, and they say no. They never seemed to experience [the taste] either. I don't believe that I've talked to anyone personally. I've heard or read in the paper. Something. Somewhere. Where different people have. And I think Dr. Leaser mentioned to me when I was talking to him about it. Several of his patients, friends, or somebody had complained of having this strange

taste, you know. And then they have this burning.

The first time, it was almost that whole week I had the burning. It was just like you were really sunburned. It just felt like your whole forehead was all puckered up and tight. It was that bad. The taste stayed and like I'd go brush my teeth, you know. And I said, "It almost reminds you of a filling that I went bad or somethin'." It was like that. Just taste like metal. Almost like coppery or something. But it was definitely there and like I'd eat or brush my teeth and it was still [there]. *[Betty says she still had the taste when they evacuated overnight 25 miles away, 9 miles past Linglestown going toward Indian Gap.]* While I was there I asked my daughter if she had any mouthwash. And I took and rinsed my mouth and then I kept talkin' to her about it. "Boy, I just don't understand. My mouth just tastes terrible." And I even thought maybe I have to see a dentist or something. Then it finally left up later in the week. And then a couple times after that when I'd 'get this burning that first year, I would get the taste and then the burning. As soon as I would get that taste, I'd say, "Oh, no! I gotta go through that burning again."

Sometimes my husband said you could see the little tiny light red pimples on my face and on my neck. But sometimes you wouldn't see anything. It felt like you were out in the sun and got very sunburned and you have this pulling, burning type feeling around your skin. It would burn so that you'd almost feel like your nose was cracked. It was like it was open. It just burnt so. And then in the throat, back in there. Oh, it would burn inside your throat! It felt like it was goin' up into your ear. You'd swallow. I'd keep drinkin' juice and cold water. It burnt so bad you'd think that when you looked in it you should see something, but you didn't. And I had trouble with the eyes off and on. The eyes would [also] burn. It was almost like someone put some burning material on my eyes, you know, like alcohol or something. It really burnt to the point where I was squinting to see and sometimes I'd put my dark glasses on 'cause it just bothered me that much.

It sort of got to be a little bit of a joke with my husband and I. I'd say, "Boy I bet they're venting down at Three Mile Island." Then usually within a day or two, all of a sudden you'd read in the paper or they'd come over the TV and say that on Monday or Tuesday or whatever day I'd had a lot of burning, they had been venting. I was putting the dates down. And on many occasions I called the doctor and I'd tell him, "I have all this burning and stuff today. Now, I wonder if they're venting." He would say, "Well I haven't heard anything." Then the next thing, we'd look in the paper and here we would read that on that particular day they had vented.

One day in particular. I was at work and it was about ten o'clock. The priest, Father Metz — God rest his soul, he has just died these past few months — he had a type of skin cancer that had been removed. Whenever they'd vent, he'd get this terrible burning around them areas. I forget the word he used, but he'd said, "Betty, I think you and I are...being able to tell when they vent by this



burning.” He’d come by and say, “Betty, is your face burning today?” It [also] got to be a little bit of a joke. That particular day I saw him in the halls and I said to him, “Oh it’s really bad today! I have all this burning in my nose and in my throat, you know.” And my eyes were just all bloodshot. I actually had like little red pimples all over my forehead. Then within the next day or so is when they finally told us that they’d had [another] emission of krypton. And of course they keep telling you, “Don’t be worried. There’s nothing.” So it was about a day or two later that we saw in the paper or on TV that here it had been accidentally emitted on that particular day. And it happened to be that day when I had all this burning.

I know there was one [other] occasion when it was really bad. Now that was summer, but I don’t know just what month. It must have been about two years ago. It was warm weather and I was out. And the sun was pretty bright that day. I went up to the barn. As I was coming back, I said, “Oh the sun can’t be that hot! I’m having so much burning.” So I came in the house and then I said to my husband again that day, “Does your face bother you?” and he said, “No.” This never seemed to bother him. “Oh, boy...today I really feel terrible.” And that day I had all this rash. It seems like it just affects my face.

Usually when they would vent, and had publicized that they vented, I would get the burning. It was all the time. The first year, they would say that they were just going to vent a little bit, in certain hours and so forth. And then sometimes they didn’t announce that they were venting and I’d be in the bathroom washing my face with cold water. I’d say to my husband, “Boy, I bet they vented today.” There were lots of times, maybe forty times that they didn’t announce it [beforehand]. And after that you’d find out that they did vent that day. Eventually it comes out. You know, someone finds it out and then they admit that they had released a little bit for so many minutes or [whatever].

The first year, between us — Sister Timothy and I and Father Metz, Dr. Leaser and my husband — there was about forty-seven times when this burning happened to me and I’d talk to them and I said, “Now you watch the papers or listen and tell me.” Out of about forty-seven times, there were forty-five times that we accounted that they did vent. It came out on the news that they accidentally vented or they were venting deliberately or something. In about a year’s time. And that was a lot of times I had detected it.

I had it into ‘80, but it lessened you know. I didn’t have it as often. And then there was a period last year sometime when I was having it almost daily for about three weeks. Then we saw or heard that they were deliberately venting each day between certain hours or something in order to get the clean-up taken care of. I’m pretty sure that was last year sometime. They were deliberately releasing some and they continued to tell you that there’s no danger. It’s such a low amount that it doesn’t bother you. In fact, you know, I’ve even had it a couple of times this year [1983].

I told my doctor, "I don't know if any of this has anything to do with things that are happening. So many things have happened to me since [the accident]. I've had to go have surgery on my thyroid. Underneath [the right eye] I have all these little cysts. The doctor removed six of them. He said I have some on both but that they're too small to do anything about. But eventually they may get larger and then he said he'd remove them. Now I've been to Hershey Med Center and to ears nose and throat doctors for my sinuses. I have all these polyps and mass growth in my sinuses. I have this mass in here and they can't drain it. They said that as soon as I make up my mind that I want to go have it out, [they would do it].

*[Betty again recalls the week of the accident.]*

The first week especially the burning was so bad. I had a terrible headache, but I get headaches when I get upset and I just assumed this headache was from that. I've had headaches [before the accident that were] that bad. The headache the week of the accident was just like a migraine. I had it back up in the back of my neck. It made me nauseous. I just felt like I wanted to vomit, oh for about three days. I could hardly keep food down. I'd go to eat, [but] I just felt like I had to vomit all the time, but I didn't. I was real nauseous. *[Betty said that, not all the time but on occasion before the accident, she has had headaches that made her feel like vomiting.]* I had diarrhea and I had a lot of headaches that first year. But like I said, I was really upset over everything and even now, sometimes you start hearing those sirens and it kind of makes you jump for a minute. You never know what's going on. I did experience a good bit of diarrhea that first year. More than usual I would think. I know that first couple weeks after the accident, I was [also] experiencing such terrible pains in my joints. Up in my legs and knees and in my hips. I had severe pain. And I was taking Anacin every couple hours. I even went to the doctor about that. But then that kind of left up. Probably was my arthritis. But I mean with everything [happening], soon as you get something you think, "Boy, this is because of [TMI]"

Things upset me. But after this had happened, it seemed like I get upset much quicker. And I'm trying to relax because the doctor told me I have to because I have such high blood pressure. I'm talking blood pressure medicine. It wasn't that high before all this. I had had it from time to time but not like it's been.

I only remember about twice that I had this terrible burning inside, like up in my ears. And it just felt like somethin' had ya by your throat, almost like you were swelled in there. And I breathed with my mouth opened. Both times I was in bed. The one time, I woke up and it felt like I couldn't hardly get my breath. I know I had the burning and the metallic taste. But I don't know if it had anything to do with that at all and I went to the doctor's because my blood pressure was up. It was quite high. He said that when people get nervous and upset, sometimes the throat muscles will swell and you can't

get your breath and breathe properly. So, you know, I think that nerves play a large part with people.

*[Aileen: We've talked to quite a few people who had the metallic taste.]*

BETTY: "Oh, really. I [thought] I was the only one. As far as the burning, [since] I talked to the doctor and he said he had people come to him who had the burning, that much I knew. I figured, well someone must be experiencing that. But the metallic taste, I don't know. It's a strange taste and you can't explain it to anybody unless you'd tell 'em to take a penny and put it in their mouth and see how a penny or coin would taste. And it doesn't go away. That's the odd part. It's just there. You can eat an apple or an orange and as soon as you're done, the taste is there. It's a strange sensation. Nothing that you put in your mouth takes the taste away.

I have real sensitive skin. Always did. Like even as a youngster, I couldn't wear make-up. A little bit of lipstick. But if I put rouge on, my face would get flushed or red. Couldn't wear face creams. As soon as I put them on, my face would like puff up and get all red. Now having sensitive skin might make a difference. I don't know.

*Vegetation and animals at the Fawbers:*

Our walnut trees back here and all the trees here facing towards the island, it just seemed like all the leaves were brown, withered and dead on 'em [the year of the accident]. They were green and growing on the opposite side away from the island. It was really strange to look at our fruit trees and all. Then the following year they came out green again.

As the leaves were growing out on the trees that year, they would start out in little shoots and they would kind of open up and then they would curl up. Just brown and curl up. Because I was really observing them. Especially this one out front. I would see it and the leaves would start coming out and by the next day the whole leaf was out but it was starting to curl down and within a day or two, it would all be brown. It was just like it was actually burning. It was just so strange. We have a whole row of black walnut trees out there. And that first year, when our walnut trees flowered, there was not one walnut on 'em. Not one.

After the accident happened, we had different times where we'd go up and there'd be chickens that were dead. Just one at a time. Unexplained. We had maybe about six like that. Their beak and all looked all white and they were just dead. But the rest of 'em seemed to be all right. The chickens started dying like that, I'd say maybe six months after the accident. Then we had cats and our one cat had kittens and all of 'em was born dead. That was about a year after and that could have been just somethin' normal too. But everything seemed strange to me. I had two rabbits and one had a litter of

seven bunnies, but they were all born dead. They looked perfect, but they were dead. It was about '81. I don't know if this has any bearing on [the accident] at all. But it just makes you wonder.

## **Evelyn Shields, Highspire**

*Avon representative*

Telephone Interview: August 27, 1980

*Evelyn worked in Highspire or Lower Swatara from Wednesday through Friday the week of the accident [March 28th – 30th].*

Earlier in that week I had a taste. Friday it was very strong. I had had this taste several times before but this time it was really potent. I'm an Avon representative. So I am out a lot. Friday I was in the 5-mile radius delivering Avon products. By Friday I tasted it really strong. Really got to me by Friday. Even my hands felt funny. When I felt my other fingers, it was weird. [There was a] different feeling with my fingers. I didn't tell anybody about this taste because I was afraid people might think I was crazy in my head, or something.

We left Friday night. And this feeling went away when we went to the mountains. I don't know exactly when, but I noticed on Sunday I was walking in the mountains with my sister, talking, and I mentioned about this taste. I remember we laughed about it because she said she had had it too. And my sister said, "I was ashamed to say it, too." Anyway, we both got rid of it while we were there.

We came home Tuesday. My sister lives in Highspire. A relative had [the taste] too. Also my mother had it. Mother was in Highspire mostly staying home because her heart is not well. Other people had it too. They mentioned it to me on my Avon route. I don't remember which ones said this.

I had [the taste] since the accident only once, recently, about the time they were doing more releasing. But it didn't last long.

## **Larry Espenshade, Highspire**

*28 years old*

*Doctor: DO*

Interviewed: March 1, 1983

I stayed here in Highspire. It would be I guess by Sunday, Monday of that following week when the evacuation was still in effect, that I began to notice a taste in my mouth. It was somewhat of a bitter

taste described by some others, and I would have to agree, a metallic taste. As if you would maybe put a piece of a utensil or something like that in your mouth, an old utensil that the coating or plating had been worn off of, and you get somewhat of a taste in your mouth from that. That type of a thing. That persisted for weeks after the accident. I would notice that periodically. More so being outside. If I were working in the yard or with my children or something like that as opposed to being inside in the building. It was always through Highspire. Through this geographical area. My wife [tasted it] also. The children didn't. But they were only two and four at the time.

I worked at Three Mile Island doing physicals immediately after the accident. On the Saturday before what would have been Easter, I think, I was down there that Saturday morning and I walked out onto the first aid trailer's porch which was directly across the street from Unit 2. I was standing out there to get a little of what I thought was fresh air. This was around noontime and the sun had just come out — it had been cloudy and overcast that week — and it was warm. And as I was standing there soaking up a little fresh air and sunshine, I got this taste in my mouth. At the time I still really hadn't put things together that much. And I thought, "What is this?" So I went back inside. They had given us food because we were working straight through, and I ate. I didn't think too much more about it until the next evening on the news when they said that they had blown all kinds of I 131 out of that reactor because somebody took the filters out and forgot to put them back in again. It just hit me all of a sudden. I had been directly across the unpaved road that ran along the trailers and along the containment building, reactor building. Now, whether that plume went straight up from that vent, or whether it came down and went across to where I was standing...there's an awful strong correlation there between radioactive iodine and what I was experiencing at that point, which kind of perturbed me a little bit.

## **Molly Reinhart, Harrisburg**

*39 years old*

*Housewife*

Interviewed: October 18, 1982

*Molly evacuated with her mother, two daughters and in-laws. Her husband who runs a pharmacy in Colonial Park stayed behind to work.*

My in-laws live in Highspire. They're on High Street two blocks off of the main street at the corner of High and Ann. They're right at the five mile borderline. They were in their seventies. Now they're in their eighties. And oh, it's just *terrible* for older people.

We left Friday. [After we left] my in-laws are worried about their dog. They left their English Setter

down at their house. So I said, “Well, we’ll drive back down and get the dog. We came down. It was my mother-in-law and myself, and it was the eeriest feeling coming down that highway. Everyone was going the other way and it’s like, “What am I doing, going into this area!” It was strange.

I had so much trouble getting the dog, ‘cause he’s really a hunting dog and he’s not used to walking on a leash. And he’s *dragging* me up the bank. *[Laughter]* I think it was just the two of us down in Highspire getting the dog. It was after dark. And it was a Saturday. Anyway, we got the dog, and that was eerie because there were hardly any lights on in Highspire. We didn’t see *anybody*. Nothing. It was just a strange feeling. No one was going or coming. It was just like we were the only ones there. And that’s when I remember a strong taste of metal in my mouth. It was like a metallic... It was funny... it was just, metal. That’s just probably a really dumb way to say it. A strong taste of metal. And this is when we were down there getting the dog, flying up the bank. *[Laughter]*

It was just when I was out of the car, not when I was in the car going down, but when I got out at their house and had to go round back and get the dog. My mother-in-law went directly into the house to lock up. And I was out getting this dog and bringing it back up. It was only a matter of oh, five, ten minutes ‘til I got him, got his dishes, everything that had to come. I brought him, or he brought me back up around. So, I was out a little more. And I just said, “Mammie, let’s get out of here as fast as we can! Close up the house.” She just wanted to make sure everything was tight. “Let’s get out of here!” It was just really eerie down there. Spooky. We went on back to Perry County, and then the next day we left and went further up to State College, up to Penn State area. We just rented two motel rooms and we stayed there I guess to the following Wednesday or something.

I’ve never tasted that since. And I’ve never tasted it before. I mean radiation does have a taste, does it? Or smell, or anything. I don’t know what. Maybe it was something entirely unrelated. I have no idea. But I still do think in my own little mind [that it was]. Well, I wasn’t afraid because I had · it. I just thought, “What is this?” And I asked my mother-in-law. I remember saying, “Do you taste anything?” It was *taste*. It was funny. And she didn’t. That was it. I mean it wasn’t that big a deal. I wasn’t that concerned.

I don’t know if [I tasted it] as soon as I opened the car door. I was aware of it when I was outside. All I know is, like it hit me with something. “What is that?” And I only spoke to one other person that I think said that they had that. And I’m not even sure who that was. But there was someone else who said they had that taste. I know that if I think hard enough I’ll remember who it was.

I don’t really remember if it lasted, if it was in the car with me. The dog was very active. I was not used to driving in the car and he’s like all over. I was more concerned about getting out of there. I wish I had never gone down. I really did.

*Metal.* Now, how would I know what metal would taste like. I have no idea. Metal. That's the only word I can use. I can't even put another word to it. Isn't that funny when you think of it. *Metallic.* But how do you know what metal tastes like? I don't know. [But] a metallic taste is what it tasted like.

*[Molly remembered that the other person she talked to who had the taste was Carol Butler, the piano teacher of one of her daughters whom she met at State College while evacuated.]*

## Carol Butler, Colonial Park

*36 years old*

*Piano Teacher*

Interviewed: October 25, 1982

*[Carol's husband, Tom, 32, works for the railroad.]*

I don't know if you've talked to anybody that had any bad experiences.

I'm very quick for taste, sense, this type of thing. I feel them extremely. I guess faster than most people. *Thursday* we were not aware that there was any problem [at Three Mile Island]. We had *no* idea whatsoever. I was at a music seminar at Fulton's Music Store in the shopping center across the street, and we took a break at lunchtime. We were all going over to eat, and I said, "Boy, oh boy! The air is so thick today. I feel I can taste it." And different ones were saying, "Well, what do you mean?" And I said, "I don't know. The air is just so heavy out here today." This is before we knew anything had happened. After we went out to eat, we came back, and I actually felt sort of sick in my stomach. I had come home and I kept saying about the air, you know, being heavy and feeling half sick. Now, I get my hair done up in Halifax which is up over the mountains. So we went over to Halifax to get my hair done. And when we got up there, as soon as I got out of the car, "Boy, the air is so different!" I could tell just that short distance from, here. And this was on Thursday.

The next day, Friday, I was home here, and I was teaching. Tom called me in the morning. He is the first person to tell me that something had happened at TMI. I didn't really know what he was talking about at first, you know. I called my mother and of course she didn't want to leave. She's old. "I'll stay here. If the house goes up...why, you know, I'll go with the house." I said, "No, you're going with us." She lives in Linglestown which is down this road four or five miles from here. Tom got home from work and we went out that evening. And I had such a metallic taste in my throat. It really was a very metallic... It was much worse than it had been on Thursday. And I still felt half sick, just like I wanted to throw up. We went over and we got my mother and father and I said, "We're going. If the

thing would blow, I don't want you here." We all packed up and we drove on up to State College that Friday evening late at night. I guess we checked in close to about twelve o'clock. The halls there were just filled with people from down in this area. Half of Harrisburg was up there. *[Laughter]*

We were up there Friday night, Saturday and Sunday. Everybody we ran into in the hotel, in the halls, and out in the street were all from home trying to buy papers and trying to get information. By Monday we were thinking, "Well, this is it." We more or less felt that we probably would never see our homes again, that it would blow. We were actually trying to figure out where we were going to relocate. And we were also figuring what routes would be the best to leave there. And my father said, "Let's get back to Harrisburg and try to get our money out." Well the banks were just run on. But we didn't know that because we were up there. We decided to make a trip back and get what we could here at the house. We figured this would be the last time we'd ever see our home. The closer we got to Harrisburg, you could see the heaviness in the air. How about it, Tom. You could just see it hanging.

TOM: The sky really looked strange. Very strange. I never have seen anything quite like it. The air just seemed to hang very heavy. I'm not one to be particularly sensitive to things, but I experienced a metallic taste. I can't describe it any better than that. Just like a metallic taste ...in your mouth, just breathing the air.

CAROL: I sort of remember seeing the sky looking funny while we were still coming down the mountain area. When we got around Marysville. Probably a little before Marysville. It was dark, almost like a storm. Black on a real odd colored background. Real dark, black, and marble looking. Very heavy looking sky. My father had the taste coming down. We all made the remark about the sky looking so terrible.

We arrived at the bank around nine o'clock. I got out of the car and that's when I started having not just the metallic taste. My throat burned, like it was on fire. And I just felt sick. As we went into the bank area, I really started minding it. I was getting like a headache. I said, "Well maybe it's just my nerves from all this pressure." When we got out of the bank I remember saying to Tom, "My throat burns. I don't know why, but my throat burns. Does yours?" And he said, "I have a metallic taste." I said, "I want to go to my home." So, we came over here and the closer we got here the worse the taste got. And my eyes started watering. My eyes just teared, constantly. It wasn't that I was bawling. I wanted to keep my head together. I knew all I had in my mind to do. I'm not a person to go to pieces. When everything is over and done, then I'll collapse, but up to that point I'm good.

*[Laughter]*

As we got into the house here, I was coughing by that time and just about choking. We got the door closed and I could breathe a little bit easier but there was just this terrible taste in my mouth and my



eyes just kept watering. I couldn't stop them. We got our stuff out and I started coughing. We started back up to State College. And as we were going back up, my throat started clearing. The tears stopped and everything. I'm positive it was the air and whatever was in it that was causing it.

That was Monday morning. We had been here at the house just long enough to pick up our personal belongings. We wanted everything out of here that we could get out of here, because we figured we were going to start life over again. It would be the last time we probably would ever see our home. We were convinced this was it.

TOM: Then different times after that, they had what they called accidental venting which would occur at 2 a.m., 3 a.m.. You know, "Oops, the valve came open. Shut it right away." *[Laughter]* They'd just get on the news and matter-of-factly announce, "There was an accidental release last night. It only lasted two or three minutes. Don't get upset about it." That kind of thing. We'd watch the weather. I'd see which way the wind was blowing. Every now and then you'd experience this taste *[again]*. I had it maybe three, four times.

## **Karen Melvin, Camp Hill**

*38 years old*

*School bus driver*

Interviewed: October 6, 1982

I drive a van for the school. I take little children to school every morning. I tasted that awful metallic taste when I was crossing the bridge. *[Interstate 81]*

That's when I first noticed it. And it's this taste I didn't get out of my mouth until after we *[evacuated]*. It was still in my mouth when we left. It was like an awful metallic taste. "

I went to pick the children up so that they could go away. Some of the parents were taking their children out of town. And so it was *[on Friday]* like maybe around noon time that the decision was made to take these children, and leave. So that's when I would have been going over to pick them up. And I really noticed that. I just kept swallowing. Distinctively metallic. It just hung in there. I've never had it before and I've never tasted anything like that since. And I was not eating anything. And even after that, when I did drink or eat — I'd get drinks and I brushed my teeth — I still had that taste. Probably into the next day. We had gone away Friday.

## Jean Trimmer, Lisburn

54 years old

Farming

Interviewed: August 15, 1986

*The following is an excerpt from a statement Jean Trimmer recorded on March 19, 1985 recounting her experience during the week of the accident.*

*The statement is presented here almost in its entirety.*

Friday evening, it was very windy and the rain was falling steadily here at our farm. Our cat named Friday had gone out to relieve himself, and when he didn't come back to the window sill within a reasonable length of time, I became worried, for I could hear him mewling in a very strange fashion. His mewling was more of a howl than a meow. Thinking that he would come as soon as I had opened the front door, I did not bother to put on a coat, but only put a scarf over my head since I had just washed and set my hair. Friday didn't come as expected. So I went out to the front porch, standing back against the wall of the house and called and called to him. He kept howling. So I went over to the banister, leaned over, and called him again.

The wind had been blowing steadily from the north to the south. When suddenly, there was a moment of intense stillness. The wind stopped abruptly, and a wave of heat engulfed me, bringing the rain in all over me. It happened so quickly that it startled me and made such an impression on my mind that to this day I still relive, over and over, those few minutes. I cannot get away from them.

The cat finally came, and I bent down to wipe the rain from his coat, and we both went in. I was thoroughly disgusted when I felt my own hair which had become soaked about halfway back because the wind had blown my scarf nearly off. Then I did a really dumb thing. I washed my face and hands with soap and water and only dried the rain from my arms, neck, shoulders and legs with a towel, not using any soap and water. About an hour later my skin, including the skin on my face and arms had become pink and very prickly. I excused myself from the people in the living room, went to the bathroom and scrubbed all the exposed areas with soap and warm water. Then I applied a lotion to those parts that had been uncovered. Before I went to the bathroom, a neighbor had come to the door asking my husband to help spread the word that there was real trouble at TMI, and gave him a handful of papers with evacuation directions on them, and would he please distribute them to the people living on beyond our property. So he and our daughter left to do that immediately.

On Saturday, my skin was a darker shade of red and extremely irritated, while the front part of my scalp was itchy to the point where I had to scratch almost constantly. On Sunday morning, several

people at church asked me where I had got my sunburn. My face, arms, neck and legs were quite red. And small hard bumps had come out on my forehead and up into the front of my scalp. On Tuesday, I washed my hair again using three applications of shampoo instead of the usual two. The itch was awful.

About three weeks later, white hairs appeared all through the front of my hair and the tops of my eyebrows were white. The hair came out in my comb in unbelievable amounts. I could now see my scalp through the thin hair on the front half of my head. I made an appointment with the person who gives me my permanent and he in turn gave my head some special treatment. Eventually, the hair loss stopped and several weeks later, new growth appeared. The hair on my forearms was always flat to my skin, but more appeared to be growing in all directions. When Dr. Kirk [who heads the Environmental Protection Agency office in Middletown -ed.] came to my home to interview me, I showed him this erratic growth on my arm. It is still growing in the same manner. My throat is no longer sore on the inside, but some of the ugly discolored skin remains on the outside. To this day, almost six years after TMI, I am not well.

I have lost my left kidney completely. It just dried up and disappeared with no medical explanation whatever. And my case was presented by my kidney specialist to a symposium of doctors at the Hershey Medical School. None of them had ever had a case like mine, nor had they any explanation of such an unusual happening. Also, our eldest granddaughter has been hospitalized on two occasions for abdominal problems. She and her sister visited us for the three summers following TMI and spent much of their play time on that same front porch. There was no record of any similar abdominal problems on either side of her family tree. We can only hope and pray that both she and her sister and the other three grandchildren will remain healthy, for they have all played on that same porch. The awful part about this is that we did not even think of possible contamination still remaining there. But we are just ordinary persons without any scientific knowledge concerning radiation, et cetera. To this day, March 19, 1985, the discoloration is still visible on my arms and neck. Red spots still appear on my face, arms, legs, breasts, shoulders, abdomen with alarming regularity. I can assure you that TMI is an ever present fear in my life, because the physical evidence is something that I see daily. The traumatic fear within me cannot be seen by anyone, nor felt by anyone else, but it is there constantly in my mind. You cannot possibly know what happens inside me when the TMI siren is tested or when, for unknown reasons, it suddenly sounds.

Thank you for listening to my sad tale, all of which I would gladly swear to on an open bible. Thank you so very much for your time. [March 19, 1985]

**Keith Malcodi, Lewisberry** [near Redland High School]*Dentist**27 years old*

Interviewed: January 24, 1983

I had x-ray film that was damaged, but getting to the reason why it was damaged is a very hard thing. Most of what I say would be subjective.

It could be a coincidence, but two days prior to the accident, I had a metallic taste in my mouth. I had an anxious feeling, like I was coming down with something. It could have been completely coincidental. I mentioned this before I knew about the accident. I had said that I feel queazy and have a funny taste in my mouth. Wednesday and Thursday is when I had this weird taste. I had it here at the office. I think the taste faded when I went home. My stomach was not nauseous but like when you're anxious, about to take a big test. At the time I thought I was coming down with something. My mother lives in Baltimore and Thursday night she told me about the accident. She said, "You mean you didn't know about it! You're still there?!" Friday morning around 9 a.m. they came around and announced the accident. Shortly thereafter, an evacuation notice went up on the front door.

Two days prior to the day they made the announcement, during Wednesday and Thursday we were having trouble. Our negatives were partially exposed. We never had that prior or since. It was all fogged, with a shading, a striation. Almost like banded. Part of it was clear, then it would be gray and then clear again. Like striped. The banding was pretty much neat on through all of them. When they were coming out funny we ran some non-shot ones and they came out banded [also]. The film was in the back unit. It was in a drawer and protected from radiation in the building. It is Kodak type D film. It comes wrapped in lead. Once open we put them in another container so all the front part is exposed but it still has the lead backing. It is still in the lead foil but opened. There were two boxes each, maybe more. If the film was still sealed, it was O.K. If opened, it was ruined. The windows are never open in the building.

The taste was a little bit bitter. I'm trying to find a way to describe it. Just bitterish, metallic-like. I never experienced anything like that unless there was a reason. I use tin to keep packing in place. It reminded me of a tinny taste. It was a mixture between tin and acetic acid. Ozone. I think I might have had that taste in a bad thunderstorm. Again, that's subjective.

When we heard about [the accident] on Friday we thought, "Ah. That's what probably happened." Once they announced the accident we hung the film outside. We did that just to monitor. None were exposed. We kept testing the film. They came out perfectly clear. So my feeling is, as far as this direction from TMI, if there had been any radiation in this area it was before the announcement was made. Our lawyer may have a couple of the films. We put in a claim for business interruption.

As time progressed, you get kind of fed up with the whole situation. But we can't shut down the plant just because we have this film. .

*Unrelated to the TMI accident, a government agency checking x-ray equipment tested the Malcodi/Klein dental facility to see whether their wall partitions were x-ray proof. They fired x-rays against the walls and got no readings on the other side. The film that was damaged during the week of the accident was in three different locations. One of the locations was protected from the clinic's x-ray equipment on all sides.*

## **Bill Peters, New Cumberland**

*46 years old*

*Owner of an auto body shop*

Interviewed: January 7 and 31, 1983

*At the time we first interviewed Bill, he owned and operated an auto body shop adjacent to his home.*

We heard on the news Wednesday morning [March 28th] that there was a minor mishap or something like that down at Three Mile Island. It was nothing that even concerned us. We kind of even laughed about it.

Thursday, we were in the garage working. It's a large garage and I have large doors that a tractor trailer type truck would back in. Well, my son and I, we were in there working all day on Thursday. We weren't outside. We had the doors open 'cause the weather was warm. We were inside working. We went up about nine-thirty, ten o'clock at night and took a shower. I had come out `joking. I said, "I got a sunburn!" [*Laughter*] That was Thursday evening. And we were joking about it. We really didn't think it was anything really that bad. It looked like we got a mild sunburn at the seashore. Anything that was exposed. 'Cause we had T-shirts on and right where your arms went, it looked like the way you look like if you were electric welding. You probably don't know anything about this, but when you electric weld and you don't have yourself covered up, you'd get burnt, you'd get red. It's similar. And this is what you look like.

Friday, I was redder. Like you were laying in the sun the first time you go out in the beginning of the year, and you'd get red. That's what it looked like. Friday morning, we were joking. Nobody wanted to say anything. We were getting this hot feeling in the throat. And you were tasting, it tasted like you were burning a galvanized steel with a torch, you know, or welding it. This is the kind of taste you had

in your mouth. This is exactly what it tastes like. It made you half sick. Sometime in the afternoon on Thursday we had started tasting it. And it kept getting stronger and stronger. My son-in-law, he came home Friday from Hershey and he says to me, "I taste something." And my daughter, she was working at the hospital, and when she came home she said she was tasting it, and they lived down the road here. And nobody would really admit what they were feeling, 'cause everybody thought we were imagining it. It was nerves or something like this.

Well, you felt hot down in your chest. Friday morning I got up and I had blisters, little bitty white blisters on my lips and in my nose. And then also I got diarrhea real bad. I had it that weekend real bad. And you felt half sick in your stomach, half nauseated. See, that could have been from nerves too. I mean nerves would do that to you. And from that time on, it would seem like I was having trouble with my bowels up to about...oh, man, about two or three months ago, I guess it was. I was having problems. Not as bad as it was then.

[Friday afternoon] while in the process of leaving, the Fairview Township police come down the road and he hollered, "Bill, get the hell inside! I mean it. Get inside. Don't breathe the air! Close your doors and windows!" So I waved to him, I said, "Yeah...keep going!" *[Laughter]* "I'm getting out of here! I'm not staying!" So we kept loading. This is about three o'clock in the afternoon. And this is when, I think, we got the worst of it. So, we left here about four, four-thirty.

When I got up Saturday morning my lips were burnt more. And they were blistered. I couldn't blow my nose, it was sore. I never had this before.

Sunday morning I was blistered more. You know how you get sunburn blisters. [But] I never got blisters in the sun. I never had blisters on my lips before then. Down in like your throat was really hot. It's like you couldn't drink enough. My chest. It was like putting hot towels on you, except the heat came from inside. This is something you can't explain. It's just like you were burning up inside. And you just wanted to drink. I don't know if my getting sick with this heart condition was related to the accident, but that burning feeling in the chest was located right over where that valve went wrong. *[Bill had to have a heart operation in December 1980.]*

Now, it didn't affect everybody the way it did me. Now my son, he was like that. My wife stayed in most of the time. She got a little bit. She could taste it, and got a little hot, but she didn't get like I did.

We were gone seven days. We had a four-year-old male German shepherd. He was healthy when we left. He knew how to take care of himself because we go to Florida every winter normally, and he would stay in the garage. We had food prepared. We had 200 pounds of Purina Dog Chow separated out in boxes. I had ten five-gallon cans of water that he always used. Same cans he ever used. And,

we left a window cracked in the garage, and he had a mattress in the back. When we came back, he was laying on his mattress dead. And his eyes were burnt white. Both eyes were burnt white. He didn't eat no food, hardly any food. He drank a whole five-gallon can of water, and he threw it up all over the garage. He was dead a lot more than a day. We walked in, we were sick. And you could still taste this like a burning galvanized steel, metal.

*[Darla, Bills wife says, "The mobile home was all shut, the windows were shut and everything. When we came home, outside you couldn't taste it. When we opened the door and walked in, then you could taste it."]*

It made you half sick.

We had five cats out in back. And four of them were lying dead with their eyes burnt out, burnt white like they were, just like they were burnt bad, you know. One cat was in the back of the box, in the cat box back in the corner. And her one eye was burnt. She was blind. She lived six months after that, then she died. There might have been more than that. We had kittens. The three kittens. And they were dead too. We had milk and we had water for the cats, the same as we did with the dog. And it was in a fenced-in area where no other dogs or animals could get in. There was water enough to last them for a month. And there was food enough to last them for a month. It was under a porch where it's protected from the weather. I washed the garage out. We washed everything out in the mobile home too. She washed the walls down. And we washed all our clothes.

Right about the second or third week of April, I guess it would be. It could be the last week of April. We were going back to work, and you know, you kind of even forget about the whole thing. And I was starting mowing, and I started chopping up birds. All kinds of birds. No one kind in particular. I had that [5 foot hydraulic] bucket, I would say a quarter- to a half-full of dead birds that I dumped down over the bank and covered them up back there before I could cut the grass. And that's when I got scared. And I was scared [ever since].

That summer, the walnut trees were starting to bud, but there were no walnuts on the trees. The leaves left the walnut trees. It looked like winter. That's how it looked all year with the walnut trees.

*[Darla says that the following year the leaves were maybe twice as big. Those that were four inches were eight inches. Six-inch leaves were nearly a foot.]*

They looked like palm trees. Super big.

That whole summer [1979] 'til about August there were no flies, no mosquitoes, no nothing. You'd be

outside eating and there would be no flies. We got other cats and we had, you know our other dog. There were just no flies around, and there was no flies, no mosquitoes, no bugs! *[Laughter]* It was unreal. Like 4th of July, you'd be eating and there were no flies. You have a barbecue...there were no flies. They came back about August. And there were no birds at the time either. I mean none.

I've lived here all these years, I don't need them kind of statistics. All I know is that I don't like it when you look out the window and you don't see...I mean it's crazy I know...but you don't see any birds. There's two birds that come up across here and that's it. And this used to be loaded with birds, 'cause we had bird feeders around. You go down the road two miles, you'd see all kinds of birds and pheasants and stuff. You go out to my mother's in Lemoyne, she got hundreds of them in her backyard. This is what I don't like. I walk or run a mile a day. Down over here, down there were we walk. It's a year and a half since we've been walking down that road and running, and I haven't seen a bird, I haven't seen a pheasant, I haven't seen anything. No rabbits. There's one or two little scrawny squirrels. And that's it.

I had the Audubon Society come over. They were here on Saturday [January 1983] and they just couldn't believe it. They were out here with their binoculars and looking around. They were out here about two and a half hours. I called them and told them about this. I got tired of it. I wanted to know in my own mind too if I'm over-reacting or something like this...I mean, if everything is all coincidence.

The NRC [Nuclear Regulatory Commission] guy was here. He stood out here and he said, "I was in the center of the plume and the plume was nowhere up near here." He says it was down farther down the road. But he was down the road. How does he know it wasn't up here. Nobody ever checked! He's telling me that I imagined my lips got blistered, I imagined that our dog and cats died, that there was no walnuts on the trees! That this couldn't have happened. And there were no dead birds up there. He says if it was that kind of a thing, you couldn't live here now. He says the people around here couldn't be living here. I says, "Well, not too many are living here right now!" you know. *[The cancer death rate has been very high since the accident along the road where Bill lives.]*

I'd like to know from somebody...I mean, what's your personal opinion? If you think I'm foolish, if I'm over, overcautious or overdoing the whole thing.



## Other People's Experiences

### **Colonel Paul Tibbets, Pilot of the Enola Gay**

August 6, 1945

*The following is a quote from the book Enola Gay by Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts [Pocket Books, a Simon and Schuster division, 1977. Page 314]. Enola Gay is the name of the plane that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. Tibbets was the pilot. This passage recounts the instant the bomb was dropped. [Emphasis: ed.]*

“Every man in the Enola Gay saw the light and was overwhelmed by its intensity. Nobody spoke. Tibbets could taste the brilliance. ‘It tasted like lead.’”

### **Anthony Guarisco, Atomic Veteran**

55 years old when interviewed.

Interviewed: September 1982

*At the National Association of Atomic Veterans convention in 1982, we had the opportunity to speak at length with Anthony Guarisco who at that time was in charge of one of NAAV's major projects, Reconstruction. The veterans were recalling their experiences and reconstructing the events that happened to them with their own hands. Anthony suffers from ankylosing spondylitis. He participated in the maneuvers at Bikini in the summer of 1946, when the first and then second nuclear bomb after World War II were exploded. He was a 19 year old sailor at the time. Within six hours after Able, the first bomb, had been detonated they went back into the lagoon to beach the ship again up onto the island which was about one to two miles from the point where the detonation had taken place. While he recounted this experience, he mentioned the following:*

“It tasted to me like as if somebody had put some dust in my mouth, like maybe dust from a foundry. Like some place where they grind a lot of metal. It tasted almost like that. I could taste it to this day, if I think about it. I can still taste it. It's weird. I never lost it.”

**Sally Smith, Housewife, Duncannon, PA**

52 years old [in 1979]

Interviewed: January 4, 1983

*Sally Smith was diagnosed as having thyroid cancer in 1979. She had her operation at Harrisburg Hospital in November and subsequently received therapy, once in December and then again the following March. Both times this consisted of the oral intake of radioactive iodine. Here she describes her physical reaction to this therapy.*

I was in the hospital six days in isolation simply because I was a danger to other people. My body had too much radiation in it. I'd say that for the first six hours, [I had no physical reaction], but then I got nauseous. And I stayed that way for two to three weeks. Now, my doctor declares up and down that I should not. He said it does not make you nauseous. But it did. And a terrible taste in my mouth, a metallic taste in my mouth.

The taste would be hard to describe. I think it started about the same time [as the nausea]. About six hours after I took the radioactive iodine. You get the taste afterwards and it stays with you. I had it for two to three weeks. The taste wasn't strong. I wouldn't say it was strong. [But] the taste did bother me. I think that maybe it contributed to the nauseous feeling, because, when I would eat, nothing I ate tasted right. With a metallic taste in your mouth it would be hard to taste the natural taste of food. As time went on it faded.

The doctor told me there would be a taste. He told me there would not be any nausea, which there was. He sort of insisted that I had the flu the first time. [Laughter] Which I knew better. I'm sure of that.

*[Mitsuru told Sally that many people had a metallic taste around the time of the accident.]*

It's the first I've heard [of it]. I think it's the first I've heard of it. But, come to think of it...there may have been others who've said that. It seems to me I have heard people ... and I didn't pay any attention to it. [In fact] I'm pretty sure there was somebody that said something about a taste. It was before I had my operation, and of course I had forgotten about that. And when I have spoken to people about therapy, I don't think I've ever mentioned the taste to anyone. Except to [a friend who also had radioactive iodine therapy] when I talked to her, she mentioned the taste in particular and I said, "Oh, yes, I had that too."

## EPILOGUE

I hope that these interviews will not prompt yet another “survey.”

The original wellspring of science was open-minded observation. *First of all let us look. And think. And wonder.* Today, it seems, science’s preoccupation with rational skepticism and quantitative analysis is choking us off from the reality of our lives.

The science that once challenged authority in the name of free inquiry has become Establishment. Indeed it has become institutionalized into America’s new religious orthodoxy. The experts and scientists are its anointed priests and ordinary citizens are the laity.

Among the experts and scientists I have met in the USA during this past decade, I have heard the word “discredited” used a lot. “Discredited” is the scientific word for “eternal damnation”. Once anyone is, god forbid, “discredited,” that person is ostracized, stripped of worth, and banished from “respectable society”, not to mention the decision making process. Back in 1980, I recall talking to a member of the Kemeny Commission, the official presidential board of inquiry into the TMI accident. I mentioned some experiences of the residents near the reactor site, and this person replied, “Haven’t you heard? Those people have been totally discredited.” I wanted to shout, “But how can you say that! You haven’t gone and talked to them.”

What happens to democracy in this kind of environment? When the TMI accident occurred the local people were asked time and again how they felt about the accident. The press and politicians were interested in their emotional reactions. The people must not be really valued, however, because if they were, we would be receptive to learning from their viewpoint and experiences. Had they been asked about what they physically noticed, our understanding of the accident might be radically different today. Likewise, if we valued our surrounding natural environment more, we would listen closer to its quiet testimony. We would now have a deeper understanding of what occurred.

In today’s democracy, there is a lot of talk about “for the people.” But at the same time the people are regarded as quite stupid and therefore helpless. This tendency is especially noticeable when it comes to matters concerning nuclear power and radiation. Ordinary peoples’ perceptions count for little or nothing on the quantified scales of science.

Outside of the realm of pure research, it is unfashionable nowadays for a scientist to be “passionate.” It is much more acceptable to be “objective,” and one unfortunate measure of objectivity is your distance from what you are studying. Intimacy with your subjects threatens to

“bias” your research. Numbers are therefore much preferred to descriptive observations because quantities are “objective.” That is, they appear to be objective. Sociologists thus focus on questionnaires that can be processed by computer. Epidemiologists sift statistics from hospital records rather than getting to know the people they are studying. And, for example, the dose of radiation a particular individual may have received due to the accident at TMI is calculated from computer models with little reference to the individual’s actual experience during the accident. Descriptive sociology and descriptive epidemiology rank low in the hierarchy of “respectable sciences.” Scientists and experts must always be careful of not doing anything “foolish.”

Yet all the work we do is ultimately subjective. And if it is a work of love and we do it well, it may offer insights and understanding. I often noticed during these interviews that people who like birds were much more aware of how the accident affected them. People who like cats, knew in detail what happened to the cats around them. It is love that makes us aware of things. It is love that gives us the power to observe and understand. For example, I personally do not have much affinity for vegetation. So even if I forced myself to walk around the TMI area, observing the trees and plants, I would probably learn very little, unless I changed. It would, however, be an entirely different and far more enlightening experience for someone who loved plant life, who passionately wanted to know how they may have been affected.

What has happened to us! Why do we not get out of our automobiles? Why do we not feel the lay of the land, the soil under our feet, the air, the life around us! In the summer of ‘88, one farmer near TMI told me that the snakes had completely disappeared from his fields — even from the areas not sprayed with pesticides. He thought it was TMI. Now someone may say, “He’s probably just mistaken.” Or, “It’s caused by some natural cycle.” Yet another may think, “It’s the pesticides.” Another, “It is TMI.” We are left with a confusion of random hypotheses. But if we really liked snakes, if we were really interested in them and their lives, we would probably know them better and have a much better idea what is happening to them. The same can be said of all the living things, the woods, the rivers, the rural neighborhoods and towns of the area. But to enter these worlds our keys are not distance and analysis, but intimacy and respect.

## **TMI TODAY**

Despite the common patterns in so many of the interviews, the TMI accident is not as yet felt to be a “communal experience.” People are still very isolated from each other. Even those who had “experiences” during and after the accident generally still believe it was something that happened only to them and perhaps a friend or two. We have lost the “village well” or a place to exchange gossip with a wide range of neighbors. Our communities have lost the opportunities to compare

and interpret their mutual experience. It takes time for experience to yield its true meaning. And many things that a person experiences alone can take on a feeling of insignificance, especially when they are not confirmed by others in the community or the media. We are sealed off too much from one another. It is therefore more difficult to realize the relevance or importance of our “isolated” perceptions. In the case of Three Mile Island, when the chorus of authorities began chanting “not enough radiation got out to harm to change, to notice *anything*,” it was particularly difficult for people to counteract this official gospel. And yet I can feel the strength of each individual’s conviction. For I have heard much more than a few times: “*No one*, I mean no one can tell me this didn’t happen to me. Because, *I know it did.*”

At the end of this year, 1989, we intend to send a full compilation of our TMI Interviews to everyone we talked to, hoping to remind them they are not alone and that their experiences might lead them to common action.

## **SOME PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS**

I have noticed recently, particularly when I went to the TMI area this past summer, that I am so intent on learning about the metallic taste, the burning of the skin, effects on animals et cetera that I tend to use people as a tool. In other words, I use them as a source of information. I am much less interested in them if they cannot tell me the things I am interested in learning more about. A person who can tell me a lot about what I want to know is more “valuable” than another who cannot. Actually I tend now to want to “collect” yet more such experiences rather than to deepen my understanding of them. I think it comes from the fact that I feel the greater the number of people that are documented as having experienced these phenomena, the more convincing it will be. I am trying to please the “experts” or the media or whoever is out there rather than walking to the beat of my own drum. I think I need to stop, and listen more to what that particular person I am talking to has to say. My understanding will not deepen otherwise.

TMI has a lot to teach me. I have only just begun to learn.

We have published many selections from these interviews in Japan, and hope to release them in their entirety in book form in the USA in the near future.

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*All ages of the people interviewed are those at the time of the 1979 TMI accident.*

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