

The Accident Continues: Individual Stories from TMI

Symptoms reported during the accident were real. Thousands of people called the Governor's hotline and TMIA's telephone log listed a full range of radiation symptoms. The burning or irritation of eyes, nose and throat, reddening of skin, breathing difficulties, headaches and joint aches, menstrual irregularities as well as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and subsequent hair loss - were the precursors of the nightmare to come. A letter by Harrisburg Mayor Stephen Reed, then a member of the State House of Representatives, asked the NRC why they refused to look into these effects. The NRC's Harold Denton issued the now classic response - still echoed today - that not enough radiation escaped to cause any of the effects reported.

- Living on the west bank of the Susquehanna River, Bill Whittock was startled by the roar of the steam blowing out of TMI around 4:00 a.m. Bill had the metallic taste, developed skin cancer, and now his wife has breast cancer. They were plaintiffs in the consolidated personal injury lawsuit until dropped by the attorneys. Bill died of cancer.

- While preparing to milk the cows, Marie Holowka of Zions View, was engulfed by strange blue air, choked, and could hardly breathe. She fell to the ground, was sick for days. Many of her cows died after the accident and the Guinea fowl eggs would not hatch. Marie developed a thyroid problem, breast cancer, and later cancer around her heart. Marie died of cancer.

- Louise Hardison had many problems after the accident. Goats, chickens, cats and rabbits died on her farm across the road from TMI. Stillborn lambs and some rabbits were deformed - they didn't have all their legs. Louise has also died. Her farm was sold and mutated dandelions still grow in the unfarmed pasture.

- On a hill eight miles northwest of TMI, dentists Klein and Malchodi found all the dental X-ray films taken of their patients' teeth those first two days were fogged or banded. They taped new film on the front door for the next week and found nothing wrong with those - so they concluded they got their highest doses on the first two days.

- Ruth and Clair Hoover both had the metallic taste in their mouths, they saw "white fallout" and had little red spots on their arms. After the accident they lost seven cows and 12 calves, their St. Bernard dog, and their pony. Ruth developed reproductive problems and Clair was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. They had already received settlement in the first round of lawsuits in 1985, prior to Clair's diagnosis of the brain tumor. Ruth's problems appeared to be similar to those reproductive problems in their cattle.

- Fran Cain, who still lives across the river from the cooling towers at TMI, had the metallic taste and later that year a poodle puppy was born with no eyes. She received a settlement in the first lawsuit.

- Darla & Bill Peters had that bitter metallic taste so strong they couldn't drink enough water to get rid



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of it. They had burnt skin and noses, and Bill got blisters on his nose and lips. Their dog and cats and kittens died. Later he found enough dead birds to fill a hydraulic bucket half full of dead birds. Bill died during his deposition for the lawsuit. One of the attorneys said, "It's OK, because we still have Darla."

- Charlie Conley's cows died, the hop toads disappeared, as did the bumble bees that pollinated his clover. The cooling tower drift from the plant would drift over his trees and at times the leaves would turn black - desiccated. Many trees just died about five years ago. So did Charlie.

- On Herb Myers' farm in New Cumberland, the sheep would not dilate during birthing to deliver their young. Some time later a stillborn double-headed calf was born and the vet told Herb to have it stuffed and mounted, which he did. Herb died of thyroid cancer shortly after the 10th anniversary of the accident. His family did not sue.

- "A wave of hot air" engulfed Jean Trimmer as she leaned over her porch railing calling for her cat. Shortly thereafter, her skin tingled and started to itch and later her skin appeared reddened "like a week at the beach." She got tiny white bumps on her skin and her beautiful black hair started falling out. When her hair grew back, it had white hairs growing in a salt and pepper effect. Jean developed a rare kidney illness.

- During the evacuation, Nurse Becky Mease's baby had projectile vomiting and severe diarrhea. The hospital in Ocean City said it could be radiation poisoning and suggested she have her car checked for contamination. She did. It was, and so was her purse. Later, her child developed cataracts and other health problems.

- Debbie Baker just found out she was pregnant. She lived in the vicinity of the dentist office with the fogged film. Debbie's son Bradley, was born with Down's Syndrome. The lawsuit on his behalf was settled out-of-court and was the largest made public, for over one million dollars. Debbie is one of the co-founders of the citizens' radiation monitoring networks around TMI.

Dr. Steve Wing of the University of North Carolina says, "The cancer findings, along with studies of animals, plants and chromosomal damage in Three Mile Island area residents, all point to much higher radiation levels than were previously reported. If you say that there was no high radiation, then you are left with higher cancer rates downwind of the plume that are otherwise unexplainable. Our findings support the allegation that the people who reported rashes, hair loss, vomiting and pet deaths after the accident were exposed to a high level radiation and not only suffering from emotional stress."

The accident at Three Mile Island was not a one day or one week disaster. TMI burped and vented their poisons upon us during the accident and through the years of clean-up. The symptoms were real. We did not imagine the metallic taste.