

News of Chernobyl mishap resurrects fear at home

When news of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident reached my front doorstep, the first thing I did was telephone home to see if my mother had been adversely affected.

Not that she lives anywhere near the Soviet Union, or is particularly susceptible to low doses of radiation in the atmosphere, but because she has a long-standing phobic belief that her demise will come at the hands of a nuclear power plant accident.

Such a phobia is rare in most

parts of the world, but in the neighborhood where I grew up, it became a common, although underlying, fear. The centerpiece of my old neighborhood is the Trojan nuclear power plant near Rainier. The house where my parents live, and where I lived before moving to Eugene, is literally in the shadow of Trojan's cooling tower.

If you lived in my neighborhood, it made no difference whether you were a supporter or an opponent of nuclear power. There are some of each

in that small community, but nobody made much noise. Nobody in Rainier ever made much noise.

Political views on nuclear power aside, Trojan had, has and will always have an effect on every citizen in that small community.

Reporter's notebook

The effects aren't always bad. The money generated by Trojan helped build the new high school from which my class was the third to graduate, and the first to graduate with the class song "Whitebird."

A beautiful park with man-made lakes surrounds the plant, and creates a fine community picnic and recreation area where my friends and I used to go ride bikes, play softball, boat, ice-skate in the wintertime and swim in the summer.

That is, it was a fine recreation area until the day Mike swallowed some of the water while swimming in an unnaturally warm area of the lake. He became violently ill and was hospitalized, forcing him to miss the first week of football practice.

After this incident, health officials posted signs around the lake that said, "This water is not healthy. Swim at your own risk." Of course, news travels fast in a small town — everybody knew of the incident.

and the urge to swim in the Trojan lakes would have been quelled without the signs.

But Trojan still had its other amenities. There was something about that unnaturally warm water. The same water that made Mike so sick seemed to be full of a kind of fish-growing nutrient. Catfish, bass and, of course, those ugly, uneatable carp grew to enormous sizes and astounding numbers.

But whatever made them grow so much also made them hard to catch. Maybe they were just too full of that warm, green stuff in the lake.

After awhile, the lake became so crowded with those giant fish, they started to stack up until some were literally coming out of the water. On a warm day, it would look as if you could walk across the lake by stepping on the backs of giant carp and not get wet.

Conventional carp-catching means wouldn't work with these fish. Whatever was in that water made them not only bigger, but apparently smarter than the average carp. The park director used to catch some with a giant net to keep them from overpopulating the lakes. He said he used them for fertilizer on his garden. I know he grew some pretty big cabbages.

Another piece of great entertainment (the value of entertainment cannot be overemphasized in Rainier) was the Trojan visitors center. Several amazing electronic exhibits and an amphitheater with movies gave visitors all the information they needed about nuclear power. A guided tour of the plant also was included.

After finishing the tour and viewing all of the exhibits in the center, visitors were required to take two tests before leaving. The first tested visitors' absorption of knowledge about nuclear power. That was the easy test to pass.

The second test was just as easy but a little more nerve-racking. This tested visitors' absorption of radiation.

After the tour, visitors were led through a counter machine to see if they had been exposed to excess amounts of radiation while on the tour. With fingers crossed, visitors walked through the machine while praying not to hear loud clicking noises increasing in tempo.

Meanwhile, the smiling tour guide tells you that plant workers only get exposed to five rems more radiation a year than the average person gets from normal background radiation. That is a real safe amount, I hear.

Of course, Trojan does have some adverse effects. It makes people, like my mother, nervous. Whenever a major disaster happens, people begin wondering whether they really like living so close to the plant. My parents haven't moved yet, but there have been some close calls.

Mount St. Helens, Three Mile Island, a chemical fire in Kalama, Wash., across the Columbia River from Trojan — all of these had my mother packing suitcases and planning to rendezvous with neighbors at a later date in another state.

The large steam cloud that rises above the cooling tower is the subject of many obscene comments on otherwise cloudless summer afternoons. And the loud warning sirens on telephone posts around the community are pretty unpopular during emergency tests.

Generally, people just live there and don't pay too much attention to Trojan. I believe it's pretty safe. "They" say there is no way a terrible accident could happen at Trojan like the one at Chernobyl.

But isn't that what people in Chernobyl thought?

By Chris Norred

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Rape workshop slated

Statistics show that rape is the fastest growing crime in the U.S. today. One rape occurs every three minutes, and more than one-third of all women in this country will be sexually assaulted or raped in their lifetimes.

Causes of sexual assault, psychological attitudes, and confronting and avoiding sexual assault will be addressed at a Rape Awareness Workshop, co-sponsored by the Rape Crisis Network and Eugene Parks and Recreation, today from 7 to 9 p.m. at Sheldon Community Center.

"Many of us (women) know what to do but we cannot do it," says Nadia Telsey, director of the Rape Crisis Network.

Telsey says women traditionally have been trained into the "victim role." This role causes women to wait to act in response to someone, fail to trust their intuitions and feel responsible for a sexual attack.

Studies indicate that self-defense from rape or sexual assault can be possible and effective. One such study found that the sooner a woman resisted during an attack, the greater the chance of escape.

The Rape Awareness Workshop is free. Interested persons may register at the Sheldon Community Center or call 687-5321.

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