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"WHAT SHALL YOU TAKE ALONG, IN CASE YOU COULDN'T RETURN?"

A conversation with Carol Shapiro. - took article - practical
same as newspaper U

On Wednesday and Thursday, the newspapers wrote that some of the radioactivity had leaked out of the nuclear power plant. A pump was defective. I thought when a pump was defective, the problem would stay within the nuclear power plant. They would put a new one in, repair it, or stop the production, like in the automobile industry; When a crane becomes damaged, it doesn't kill thousands of people. I didn't know that the newspaper article would affect me. The governor of Pennsylvania sends his son to a private school only a block away from my office, which is an insurance company. As we looked out the window on Friday morning, we saw that a limosine had stopped and the child's bodyguard had taken him out of the school. Our personal department called the governor's office. They said: Everything is O.K. They knew when the people started running, the streets would be blocked. They decided not to tell us anything. So we went back to work. In the meantime the governor took his son to safety. My husband is a manager in the same building in which I work. A woman in his department is acquainted with an FBI-man. He called her and told her: "You will get in your car and drive straight to me. We will take a trip to Florida." She thought it was a very nice way to propose to her. "No," he said, "You will do it right now." He probably got a tip from Washington. My husband and I left our work. However, we were ordered to leave quietly. I was to leave my work on the desk and get up and leave. We met the other managers in the elevator. They seemed to be more worried about their life than their work, however the other employees didn't have enough guts to leave. The next thing we did was pick up our children from school. They had been forbidden to go outside, because of the radioactive fall-out. They locked all of the doors and windows. Inside, the kids were running around crying and screaming through the building, getting drunk, smoking pot, and taking any drug they could get. They were totally hysterical. There were already ten parents down there when I arrived;

Their children were called over the loudspeakers. Others tried to call their parents at home or work, so that they would pick them up from school. They tried to buy themselves a better place in the line. A girl offered ten dollars to get from the thirtieth to the second place in the line. Some kids begged me: "Please tell them you're my mother and want to pick me up. I want to go home." On the radio, they announced that everyone had to stay in their houses, but why? When radioactivity can get through meter-thick walls, than it will also go through my glassdoor or my aluminum siding. I think they only wanted us in our houses, so that they knew which body goes to which house, so they wouldn't loose control over it. We wanted to go north to Reading, seventy miles away to my husbands' relatives, so that we could escape with them to Canada. My parents live only ten miles away from Reading, and I wanted to get them, since we were so close, to escape together. My husband and I got into a horrible argument over it. He thought we owed it to the children to drive straight north. But then I got determined. My mother and I never understood each other, but I can't stand the idea that I would let them be stranded. My husband said: "It will be too late, by the time you could get them." And I said: "I'll do what I have to do. It's better than sitting somewhere in Canada and saying, 'we are safe, but my parents are getting roasted down there.'" "There will be too many people leaving," he said. We didn't know of a hotel in Canada, where we could meet-- he with his family and I with my family. After two days, we couldn't find a way to get our families together. We were so upset, that we didn't know what we should pack. But my ten year old son sat down and made a list; a flashlight-- in case of a black out, drinking water, and a gas can. Then he helped my husband load the car. He showed him how to get more suitcases into the car, and thought about taking pillows along, etc. I never saw him like that. He was working better than the emergency-group of the nuclear power plant. He didn't have any fear. A few times he started to shake and cry a little bit, but then he shrugged his shoulders: "That doesn't help now," and went on. I thought that it would be worse for the boy, but it seemed like a good experience for him. It helped him. If a dangerous situation comes up, he can help anybody, anyhow at

the drop of a hat. The psychological problems he had are getting better now. Also he still has nightmares, but that's another story. On Friday afternoon, we drove down to my husband's relatives. We were glued to the television, and my brother-in-law gave us a speech about how safe and necessary nuclear power is, and how childish it was just ~~to~~^{to} leave. But he didn't know anymore about it than what he had seen on television. On Saturday night we drove back. We believed that we had reacted too quickly, because nothing blew up. Besides, we were afraid that our belongings in the house would be stolen in the mean time. We live in a very wealthy area, which was almost totally forsaken. We spent the night listening to the radio. Everyone in four hour shifts. Again one of my son's ideas. Sunday was very peaceful. There was hardly a human soul in the whole neighborhood. Only two or three families, who were veterans of course. "Army members don't run away", that's how they are programmed. I visited each one of them on that day. One of them told me that he had been in Germany during the war. If he survived the bomb war, nothing else could harm him. But his daughter who is a friend of my daughter, is fifteen. She was hysterical. She wanted to get out. But her father just said: "That's the way it is, that's the way it is." So she had to stay too. In the other families the same thing was going on, the children had to stay. On Sunday night, an officer's wife, whom I don't care for, came to our door. She had instructions, in case of an evacuation. One of the officials, whom she knew, brought her the lists, and now she had to distribute them. And that was on Sunday night at nine. So we thought that it would happen that night. We were only allowed to take blankets and pillows along, no clothes. Then, when the time would come, we had to leave fast. Also, there were certain streets we could use. Several miles from our house is a highway. Two lanes go east and two others go west. Now all four lanes would go east. However, we live west of Three-Mile Island (TMI), so when we wanted to get on the highway we had to drive at least a quarter-mile closer to the nuclear power plant. The highway leads directly past the nuclear power plant. Why couldn't we drive west? On the bottom of the list was a telephone number, and the words written: "We can do it with God's help!" Well, that's just wonderful, I said to

myself. An evacuation plan with the words: "With God's help!"-- Why don't we go right away? I don't want to sit here until they order the evacuation maybe at three o'clock in the morning. And even then, they'd send me down to the nuclear power plant-- not me! On Sunday night we started packing and drove down to Reading. As I was packing, everything got clear to me. "What should you pack in case you couldn't return?" I packed my husband's briefcase with important papers in my suitcase. I tried to solve the problem logically. But I can still see myself standing in the bedroom, looking undecidedly at the things. But then I chose to take a little statue of Jesus, which I recieved from my grandmother when I was a child. By that time, my husband came into the room and asked me: "What are you doing?" "Well, I don't know." Then my daughter came in and asked if she could take her hairdryer and curling iron along. "Why? That's dumb!" "Why?, Because I use them everyday!" "Well, I just thought you could but one somewhere." And then I thought about the little Jesus figure. I was upset, because my husband wanted to leave our cat behind. The only reason we left her there, is because the neighbor's daughter promised to feed her. It was the officer's daughter, who couldn't leave. "You have it good," she repeated often to my daughter, "in case you get out of here with your life, write down, that I wanted to leave but my thickheaded father didn't let me." Besides, during the accident, the businesses did better. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, the people bought things like crazy. The stores made profits from high demands. The son of one of my friends went to the stores and bought new clothes, worth 800 dollars. He thought to himself that when the thing blows up, and they order the evacuation, he wouldn't get a bill for it. Other people who wanted to own a chinchilla coat once in their life, bought one now. Who knows, when I die, maybe from cancer, it will be too late. The automobile business went up also. They made their best deals of their life. After the accident, I tried to find a way to control my feelings, and understand what had happened. The first demonstration took place in front of the Capital Building in Harrisburg. I thought, "It's not the right thing for me. I am not a demonstrater." I wrote to Jane Fonda. If she could offer me a group, which is not communist, and doesn't consist only of hippies, such an organ-

in which people who are worried about it and want to have some influence on lawmaking, could do so without being arrested for it. I received an answer right away. She said I should contact a group called "TMI alert". So I looked into it. Their office was low on money. They never had more than \$50 at once. They looked like a nice bunch of people with the same concerns as I had. So I went to work. My husband was upset with me when I wrote to Jane Fonda. "You act like a hippie." he said. We argued a lot. What he meant was that it was only one power plant; The mechanics were not good enough. Someone left the pump open, that was the only mistake. But then they found out that they were working with defective parts and there were 42 mistakes in the reactor. Even though my husband was not involved with the "TMI alert", he wanted to go along to the women's and children's march to Reading. He just wanted to go to watch. Then he met a person who was filling up balloons with air for the children. With a lot of talk we got him to help. Then he helped pass them around. The next thing I knew he was wearing a women's and children's march T-shirt, and telling people what to do, as he would if he were the boss. "What's the matter with you?" I asked him. "It's a good organization, and they are nice people. They have a lot of things to say." He started listening and read the information listed by "TMI alert", and he stood up for it at Blue ~~Cross~~ ^{SHIELD}. He had to see that the group was O.K. It's hard for the people to fight against something that the government says is good. They are afraid to be seen as protestors. Some people in the group are totally against nuclear power. But some- like me, think that it is a good idea, only it is too soon to use it. We are not ready for it. When they find a way for 100% safety, then I will be all for nuclear power ~~to~~. But I think it will take us about thirty to fifty years until we are ready for it. We would have lost everything by a melt-down. The houses would stay in good shape, and the plants would be very green and beautiful for a short period of time, but then everything would have died. It would look like winter without snow. It would be a ghost town. The area could be used only after 200 years. In the past, when the president said nuclear power is good, I believed him. Now I am skeptical about it. When I had children before, I had no worries. I would never have any now. I don't want children to live in a world that is trying to kill itself. At times, being against

nuclear power was embarrassing! People kicked me out of two places. I had the responsibility to fill my area with information. So I called a bank, and got their permission to lay the pamphlets in the entrance. I set them up in the hall and went to leave. Someone approached me and said, "Who gave you the permission?". "I called before." "You can't pass those around, nuclear power is safe." She started to make a scene. "Pardon me," I said, "can I talk to the manager?" She answered, "That's me." I almost died. "And now get out of here, and take your communist staff with you." Everybody was staring at me. It was the bank right across the street from my office. I felt like just crawling through the door. Next I went to the supermarket. "Can I put these information sheets on the side her?", I asked. "Of course!" But when I went to put them down, the manager came around the corner, and yelled: "I will tell you one thing, you are a member of a communistic group." He screamed at me, and I tried to escape through the door. He followed me, screamed at me, almost until I reached the end of the block. I was never so embarrassed in my whole life. So I thought of something else. I took our old car, which is already rusted and damaged, and took two big peices of poster-board with "Woman and children parade to Reading" along with when and where written on them. I attached them to the car, and drove through the streets, and parked it with a bunch of the information sheets in front of the store. My daughter was reluctant to drive around with me in that car. She said that I was starting to act funny. My son had a lot of fun. He liked it. I let him help me. When the people get information papers from a little sweet boy, they look at it before they destroy it. It's true that people scream at you, or try to attack you. And the manager didn't want the information in or out of his store. They just say: "TMI, what's that? Never heard of it. Life goes on and we must forget about it." And life will go on. Summer will come, that's for sure. They just wanted me off of their property. Since the accident, I have a repeating dream. My husband brings us to safety, in Canada. I see us jumping around in happiness yelling yeah, yeah, yeah, we did it, we will stay alive, we don't have to inhale that stuff..." Then the picture changed. We see a nuclear power plant behind the trees. Then the horns start blowing. Melt-down, Melt-down. Some of our neighbors drove to South-Carolina. They stayed with friends. But four days later, they were back.

There they were, right back in the center of a triangle of nuclear power plants. All of them no more than 20 miles away. At first, their friends feel sorry for them. They say how lucky they are that they don't have it in their front door. Until a neighbor told them that there are three of them right around the corner. They just didn't know about them. You don't talk about it. It's like a tabu. It was the same thing when we moved here. "Three-Mile Island... What could that be?"