

CLASS OF 1979

Walter Cronkite at 30th March 1979. "The world has never known a day quite like today. It faced the considerable uncertainties and dangers of the worst nuclear power plant accident of the atomic age. And the horror tonight is that it could get much worse," he told a frightened country during the crisis. (The Associated Press/file)

Do you remember what you were doing when the news broke about a near disaster at the Three Mile Island Nuclear Power Plant near Harrisburg, PA? In March, 1979, F&M students had just returned from the early March Spring Break. Who knew we'd be getting another week off from school? The TMI incident broke on the early morning of Wed 28th March 1979. F&M classes were eventually cancelled for the entire following first week of April. All of this was decided by the College officers who were guided by President Carter and then Pennsylvania Governor Thornburgh in saying "it's better to err on the side of caution." Most students fled to their homes and parents. Meanwhile back on campus, T-shirts sprouted among the small percentage who remained with this logo - Nuke Party - 3 Mile Island - Spring 1979 - Hell No We Won't Glow !

F&M began monitoring the level of radiation from a station set up by the physics department and that monitoring reported no significant increase in background radiation detected since the accident. The City of Lancaster also reported no increase in radiation levels at both the the Susquehanna River and the Conestoga Creek - both water sources for F&M. Catastrophe had been avoided and fortunately there were no public health impacts although some 140,000 local pregnant women and pre-school children were evacuated as a precautionary measure. In these

35 years since the accident, there has been a \$1billion cleanup at the plant and one of the two reactors at TMI still operates.

So it was the year of two spring breaks for F&M students. Fortunately, the College was able to adhere to its original academic calendar inspite of the unexpected second break. And students were able to catch a rescheduled on campus concert by the Charlie Daniels' Band. On campus students even received a rebate from the Saga dining room food service program - Hooray !

Interestingly, no more than two weeks before the TMI accident occurred a movie, The China Syndrome was released starring Jane Fonda and Jack Lemmon. It concerned a minor accident at a California nuclear power plant. Then editor of the College Reporter "We recommend The China Syndrome very highly. It's an excellent movie, even aside from its sudden and unwelcome relevance. If you haven't seen it, by all means do - it's certainly worth your \$3.50."

Karen Martin and Ann Reid