

TMI screams danger, mumbles routine and shines beauty

Sometimes, technology simply outglows nature

By Crispin Sartwell
For the CapTimes

The first time I rolled to work up Route 441 and passed Three Mile Island, I was intimidated. The thing seemed monstrous. As well as being "a name synonymous with nuclear disaster," it is of a size that dwarfs the human. The gigantic bleak concrete stacks suggest an engineering project in the old Soviet bloc: the relic of a five-year plan of some two-bit American Stalin.

And it feels radically dislocated from its setting. An island rendered over into concrete on a particularly lovely stretch of the Susquehanna, rising over small farms and small towns to transform the horizon, it seems to have been built on the wrong scale.

TMI is moving toward the distinction of being the first used nuclear plant to be sold. GPU has signed a letter of intent to peddle the thing to PECO and British Energy for \$100 million. The transfer has drawn the predictable outcry from folks who want an occasion to attack nuclear energy, and indeed if the thing were disassembled rather than sold and kept in service, I would be happy about it.

On the other hand, we folks who live or work near TMI don't worry much about it

anymore. After that first flush of fear on seeing the words "Three Mile Island," the sense of impending doom fades. Now the thing is just there, looming over the campus, the inspiration for the odd joke about glowing cows.

In all honesty I know next to nothing about nuclear power and am in no position to assess the safety of TMI. But even folks who live with things that regularly spin off disasters, folks who live in flood plains or near geological faults or war zones or the worst public housing projects, learn a nice fatalism and get on with their lives. The fearsome becomes ordinary.

Human life is not lived in disasters; it's lived in the everyday routine: the commute, lunch at Kuppy's diner, the kids, the dog, the television. Within a few weeks of a disaster, life is again a routine, though perhaps an altered one.

It's been almost twenty years since my colleagues started tasting the fillings in their teeth and it slowly dawned on everybody that something was wrong, almost twenty years since TMI started to melt down and 50,000 people removed themselves from the area. And if you can't get back into your routine after twenty years, you can't live a human life.

Really, there's been nothing wrong with TMI as a neighbor in the year I've been working in Middletown. It's not noisy; it doesn't smell; it doesn't set cows aglow or make Geiger counters start doing that clicking thing.

But TMI, sitting in the Susquehanna and

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constituting the landscape, is as perverse and as absorbing and as incomprehensible as a sphinx rising out of the desert.

And believe it or not, as I've gotten more distance from my initial fear, I've begun to see that it has a certain beauty: the stacks are gigantic hourglasses that possess a bizarre sensuality, and the steam that rises from them is a weather. The stacks release huge cumulus

formations that merge into the sky.

There is beauty in our technology: a cleanliness and clarity and simplicity that you don't find in stuff that isn't made by people. It is a monochrome, modernist beauty: a reduction of form to function so ruthless that the form itself is perfectly stark, absolutely purified, utterly abstract. A bird's nest is a mess of twigs and string; a shaggy, chaotic interweaving of things. TMI is a hyper-simplified concrete sculpture on a scale beyond the monumental: an expression of almost perfect purity.

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TMI is an expression of human pride on a scale that boggles the brain. We are going to take this island, pave it, raise these four gargantuan towers on it, and start a nuclear reaction. We are going to use it to make power for people, and above all to make power for ourselves.

The folks who designed TMI were not thinking about aesthetics; they were thinking about power. But power itself can make a dreadful beauty.

Sartwell teaches communications at PSH.

Mamas, don't let your students grow up to be babies

Do you want a lollipop with that grade?

By Matt Bowman
Editor

No one ever said college was supposed to be easy. Yet in many classes, students seem to think professors should feel obligated to produce study guides, review for exams and even postpone tests and projects to allow for more time. What was everyone doing the past few weeks before the project was due? Most students would have to admit, including myself, they were simply procrastinating.

Don't get the wrong impression here. There are times when an individual exception can and should be made due to conflicting schedules, personal dilemmas, etc. But in no way should any student here at PSH expect everything to be handed to them from their pro-

fessors.

Don't go to a professor and say they ruined your future because they gave you a "C." First of all, your future isn't ruined, and secondly, you're the one to blame.

If students want to be fed, burped and changed by professors, then go to school somewhere else. We need to realize that we are studying at a university here, not a daycare.

Most of us came to PSH for reasons of convenience with the underlying motive of getting that degree with Pennsylvania State University written on it. That degree will mean something someday, and it very well may put you ahead of your competition for employment down the road.

But please, earn that degree.

What does it say for you and Penn State when you are not competent to complete the tasks set before you by your work supervisors because all through your education you were spoon fed?

Everyone has classes that seem both difficult and impossible. However, I learned something during my past semesters that has given me this outlook on college.

On a personal note, I was in a class at Harrisburg Area Community College studying communications under the tutelage of Thaddeus Sampson. I suffered through that class all semester trying to complete everything. The work load was large, and Professor Sampson was unforgiving. There was no such thing as delaying assignment deadlines or even a curve. But guess what? His class is still my favorite class I have ever taken in college. I got a "C" so it's not because I did

extremely well. I most enjoyed this class because I had to work for everything I got, and in doing so, I retained the facts that I received from tests, papers, and lectures.

I learned, which is the whole purpose of education. At least that is what I have come up with so far.

Throughout our college experience, the classes that we struggle with the most are usually the ones that we learn the most in. So, my suggestion is: work for what you get, and then understand that you got what you worked for. Take the initiative to complete the tasks in front of you on time without complaining and grumbling.

After all, we look stupid walking around these halls wearing diapers and training pants when we are old enough to take care of ourselves.

I have to go now; it's nap time.

Letters: If you have a problem with this campus, do something about it

The people in the Student Government Association office (room 216) are the people that you elected to help make life here at Penn State Harrisburg a little bit better. They are regular students who have jobs, families, outside responsibilities and obligations, yet they find time to do one of the hardest jobs that any student can take on: They try to represent you. They take your problems and concerns to the faculty and staff here at Harrisburg and at University Park. If you would take the time to look at what the SGA does, (and judging by the election results you haven't) many of you would be very surprised.

The SGA is the voice of the students. Any time you have a problem with either a policy or a professor it's the SGA's job to try and address that problem. Does SGA always succeed? Of course not, but it is never for a lack of trying.

SGA helps fund clubs and organizations. Is SGA always per-

fect in distributing money? Again, of course not, the finance committee and the Student Government Senate always tries to be equitable. But when it comes to money, people are always going to get upset.

The members of SGA also sit on many committees here at Harrisburg and at University Park. Did you know that any student can sit on committees (you should, it has been posted all over campus). Unfortunately, it is the SGA officers who wind up on those committees. Why? No other students came forward. If there is no student representation, who knows what the faculty and staff could get away with?

SGA has many members who have very powerful positions outside of student government that could be utilized but go unused. The only time SGA is ever brought up is when someone feels that they need to complain. The Student Government be-

comes an easy target because it is filled with people who put themselves out on a limb to try and make Penn State Harrisburg a little bit better.

While walking down the halls of Olmsted, one hears a lot of complaining and disrespect for Penn State Harrisburg and its SGA. What have you done to improve PSH? The squeaky wheel will never get the oil it needs when it squeaks behind closed doors, in a classroom, or to one's classmates. If you want PSH to change, voice your ideas in a forum where you can be heard, where your concerns are considered to be legitimate and important. We challenge you to get involved in the government that represents you and do something about the problems you see, or do not complain at all.

More important than that is our attitudes as both students and student leaders. To be effective in enacting change and improve-

ment for the student body, we must change our attitude. We all should be working for the betterment of PSH. This attitude would mean that we put aside our personal differences and work for the common goal of the improvement of PSH.

The point of this ranting is to send out a wake-up call. To everyone reading this paper I know that you are very busy, we all are. But, take some responsibility for your community and school. Walk into the SGA office and say, "I want to get involved and help my community."

I guarantee that you will not be turned away.

Bob Woehr
senior senator Behavioral Sciences and Education
James Cushing
chief justice Student Court