

July 19, 1979

Occupation: Repairman

INTERVIEWER: When did you first hear about Three Mile Island?

NARRATOR: Well let's see. I was at Johnstown City School at the time and the day it happened we got a little bit done there. It was pretty much swamped for a hundred miles. News travels for that it was remote. It didn't even cool off in time.

INT: How did you hear about it?

NAR: On the radio.

INT: Did you know that the reactor was there?

NAR: Oh yeah.

INT: Do you know how far it is?

NAR: From here?

INT: Yes.

NAR: About 30 miles – 35 miles.

INT: When you first heard about it, what did you think about? Or what did you talk to anyone else about?

NAR: Well I didn't. The first news I heard of it was kind of sketchy I guess I was a long ways from it and all we heard was there was some kind of mishap and that was all the details he gave. Later on of course, they started building it up and we started getting these double reports. Nobody exactly knew really what for sure was going on.

INT: Did you think that it was serious?

NAR: When it first happened, the way the explained, no, but as it progressed, yes.

INT: Why did you think it was serious?

NAR: Well, then they started talking about the thing being melt down and the news reported – I don't know how much that was played up or anything like that...(mumble). We started getting too many conflicting stories. I was a little concerned because like I say I was down there and my family was here and I couldn't do much to help them, if they had to get out.

INT: Did you try to find out anything or any other information?

NAR: I talked to my wife. I like tried to find out what she heard on the news.

INT: So you talked about it with your family?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you talk about it with anyone you were in school with?

NAR: A little. They weren't from the area. It didn't mean much to them.

INT: Do you remember what you talked about?

NAR: Not really, just general knowledge.

INT: Do you remember if your attitude towards the whole thing changed? And when?

NAR: Well in what respect?

INT: You said that you didn't think too much of it at first, you were concerned then you got more concerned?

NAR: Well yes, the news that I heard got filled in. I got a little concerned about how bad it was because like I say, you get two or three different stories and like I say I was quite a ways from here. I couldn't get, if my wife and children had to leave, I couldn't do anything being down here so far. But, I say, when did that happen? A Thursday morning. And I believe Friday afternoon they started saying it was more serious than what they first thought. I started getting concerned.

INT: Because you were so far from home?

NAR: Right.

INT: What did you think about the way the other people were reacting to it?

NAR: Around here? Or down there?

INT: Either or both.

NAR: Well, around here I wouldn't know. All I could tell was what the wife was telling me and down there they were being indifferent, well, what did I say, its 450 miles or so away.

INT: Did you follow the newspapers? Or radio or TV?

NAR: As much as possible yes.

INT: Do you remember any particular sources that you followed?

NAR: Well, I read the accounts out of the newspapers and after awhile even down there they were starting I guess you can call; I wouldn't call it panic but concern about safety of nuclear plants.

INT: Did you pay more attention to the media than usual?

NAR: Yeah I'd say so. I'd say quite a bit more. Particularly radio.

INT: How do you think, how do you feel rather about how the media handled the situation?

NAR: I have mixed feelings on that. I don't know whether they were trying to do a job or trying to exploit the thing to make a big deal out of something. Granted it was bad, but how much they played it up I have no way of knowing. When something like that happens why, that's good copy for them.

INT: How do you think the government people handled it?

NAR: I'd say they done what they could. When Denton came in I'd say he done just about all that he could at the time. I believe if they had known earlier a lot of that stuff could have been averted.

INT: How did you feel about the way Met Ed?

NAR: A little shaky. I believe maybe they should have had a few more experienced people around. Maybe not experienced, but better trained. And there again, I'm only basing this on what I hear and what you hear on the radio and TV.

INT: Was there anyone who you particularly trusted or you thought was reliable or trusted their word?

NAR: Over there?

INT: Yes.

NAR: I don't know a soul up that way.

INT: Anybody you particularly mistrusted?

NAR: No. I believe they thought they were doing what was right. I mean if it was human error or human judgment, that's one thing. I don't really believe they, well, there again, what would you do if you were in the same situation?

INT: Did you think the people over there in charge were in control? Of the situation?

NAR: Well, I don't know about that. I'd hate to pass judgment on anybody. It's hard to say because we don't know the exact circumstances. Maybe the supervisor was tied up doing something else. I'd have to pass on that one. I really wouldn't know what to say.

INT: Do you think they are in control of the situation now?

NAR: Right now?

INT: Yes.

NAR: I would say yes, pretty much so, maybe there is a few areas that they might need work on. I believe they have learned something from it. Lets hope they have.

INT: At the time were you worried about the situation here?

NAR: Yes.

INT: And what worried you most?

NAR: What was going to happen to the family and the other people around here, if they had to evacuate.

INT: Did you make any plans then that were any different from what you ordinarily would have?

NAR: After the chance of a have to evacuate a 50 mile radius, yes.

INT: Can you remember what kind of plans?

NAR: Yeah, I told my wife to come down to where I was at. Spend the time down here in a motel until we could do something else.

INT: At the school did you change any of your routines?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you think about leaving?

NAR: Yes, I thought about me staying up here and them coming back up, then my wife decided that if there was a remote possibility that they were going to evacuate that they would come on down.

INT: Did they leave?

NAR: No. Like I say we're quite a ways from it. We are 10 miles further.

INT: What made you stay and what made them stay?

NAR: Well, just the fact that if they had started evacuating if Carlisle had been evacuated, I told her to come on down, or even Mechanicsburg, but they didn't so.

INT: What would you have wanted them to take if they had left?

NAR: Just enough clothes to have a change of clothes. Pick up what they could and leave. My wife get our deed and stuff like that, but that was all.

INT: Was there somebody in your life, family, friends that you were watching? Your wife? You know you might have been watching to make sure, to decide what to do?

NAR: I just told her after we decided that I was going to stay down here if there is doubt in her mind she ought to just pack up and go.

INT: Did you have any pictures in your mind about what might have been happening?

NAR: Well, like I say with our news reports, I was a little confused. The only picture I could see mass panic, really. Because I don't think the area was anywhere near prepared for anything like that.

INT: You think that anything happened over there might have affected your health?

NAR: Not right now. I mean three years from now, according to what they say it shouldn't. There shouldn't have been enough radiation released to affect anyone. Its hard to say.

INT: Do you think there might have been anything else, other than your health that might have been affected?

NAR: No, I wouldn't say so. You mean as far as my mental outlook on, I wouldn't say.

INT: Alright how about your community?

NAR: Well, I'd say its probably mixed up some feelings. Not really. (unintelligible) completely trusted were not. That would be the biggest thing.

INT: If the worst had happened, whatever you think of as the worst, what do you think might have happened? What do you think might have gone on down?

NAR: That's hard to figure because I don't know how. They were talking a third of Pennsylvania having to be moved out if the worst had happened so what kind of chaos that would have been is anybody's guess.

INT: Do you think that might have affected your health?

NAR: If they had to evacuate?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Well, depends on how much warning they give us. If the thing had gone down before they told people to get out, why I really don't know. Depending on which radiation that'll show up as. Is your hair going to fallout or what. That I really couldn't answer that because I'm not that familiar with what radiation poisoning could do. Other than (unintelligible). The long term affects I don't think anybody really knows for sure.

INT: Any other aspects? You mentioned panic before. What do you think might have happened if the worst had happened?

NAR: If the worst had happened there probably would have been a lot of people hurt, running into each other trying to get out. I know people were scared, probably rightly so at the time. As for what would happen, I'd say I don't really know what could. There is, there is pretty well a lot of highways to get out. But then a lot of people are going to be on them, too, so. Probably been a pretty good traffic jam.

INT: Did you have any concerns about food from down there, or milk?

NAR: From here? Not really. I felt they done a pretty decent job of keeping track of it. What do you call it, the radioactive iodine level in it. I thought they done a pretty good job of keeping that, keeping track of that.

INT: Did you see in your mind any affects of radiation on life around you? Any type of?

NAR: No, I didn't really stop to think about that at the time. Now I don't know what to say on it. Have to wait and see what happens from it, that's all.

INT: Did you think about your own death?

NAR: No.

INT: Anybody else dying?

NAR: I was worried about my family. I did want them to get up here and get you know, if that thing came, went up or melted down, I didn't want them in on something like that.

INT: And you thought you would survive? You thought you would?

NAR: Well, I wanted. Like I said I was down there and I was worried about them here. I wanted them clear of it or if something like that happened. If I'm going to say the first hint of evacuating, any evacuation other than the original five mile radius. It was the only thing at the time.

INT: During the incident did you think about God?

NAR: Oh. I'd say not.

INT: Did you pray at all?

NAR: I think.

INT: Did you feel that you had any responsibilities during the incident? Your, I imagine your family?

NAR: Right.

INT: Your job?

NAR: Well, in a sense yes, but then again I wouldn't have stayed down there. I tried to (unintelligible) amount I could, no I said I didn't but other than family. If it wasn't for family, I wouldn't be working.

INT: Did any of those responsibilities seem to clash or conflict?

NAR: No.

INT: Was your job affected by Three Mile Island?

NAR: I wouldn't say so.

INT: Did you have anything to do then that you wouldn't ordinarily have had to do?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any ideas about the best way to behave in this situation?

NAR: Could you clarify that just a little.

INT: By that I mean did you think it was best to stay calm or to do what you could to stay around to help out in any way?

NAR: I'd say it would be best if, of course any crisis situation, keep as calm as you can as you can't keep your head about you. If you start going off the deep end, why you

don't know what you are going to do. If you keep your head, that would be the best way to handle it and cope with something like that.

INT: Do you think that's an ethical idea about staying calm?

NAR: I don't know. I'm not that familiar with the, oh I would say, I think most people should, would try to, because you know you have a few that, at the first sign of trouble they are way off there someplace, but I think most people try to maintain a reasonable straightforwardness about them, and try to keep their heads some where near straight..

INT: Did you try to behave that way?

NAR: Yeah, I hope I did.

INT: Was there anything that made it hard to be that way?

NAR: Well, the way this thing reported getting worse and worse, I tell you, it probably at times was. Like I say, I try to keep things pretty much level. Once in awhile (unintelligible), I forget the exact days now but they just got worse, a little shaky.

INT: Do you remember how it made you feel?

NAR: Apprehensive, worried.

INT: Was this more or less frightening than say something like a flood? Or a hurricane or a war?

NAR: When you talk about war, that's something else, but you take a hurricane or a flood of course a flood you really don't have much warning, a hurricane you know that's coming and least have a chance to get ready. I'd say it would be no worse than a flood.

INT: In terms of being frightened?

NAR: The thing was with this, nobody was killed, nobody was seriously injured, except maybe for those two who were in the control room. I don't know how long but longer than they should have been. But, to me it's a, no worse than a flood. Fortunately, I've never been in one, so I really couldn't give you firsthand account of what it would be like.

INT: Then, what was happening over at Three Mile Island make you think about anything that happened in the past? Any experiences or events?

NAR: No.

INT: Anything like this ever happen to you before?



NAR: No.

INT: Did you see this incident as similar in any way to anything else in your life?

NAR: In my life?

INT: Yes.

NAR: No.

INT: Did any TV shows or movies or books or anything you've read or seen entertainment wise make you think, come to mind then? Did you think about them?

NAR: Not until they started comparing it with the China Syndrome. I never saw the movie so.

INT: At the time did you have any daydreams about Three Mile Island or any that you remember?

NAR: No.

INT: Have you found yourself daydreaming about it since then?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams? Dreams about it while you were asleep.

NAR: Not that I recall.

INT: Did you have trouble sleeping at all?

NAR: A couple of nights. I guess I was concerned about my wife and children.

INT: What sort of, have you had any trouble sleeping since?

NAR: No.

INT: What sort of changes did you see in people around you?

NAR: I'm not sure there was.

INT: Do you think it changed anybody in a lasting way?

NAR: You mean, well, maybe right around the area it did, yes, I don't know. What's you know (unintelligible ) it's a long time, the human mind can forget a lot of things in a year or two. So you now its hard to answer.

INT: Do you think it changed you?

NAR: I wouldn't think so.

INT: Did you hear any jokes about Three Mile Island radiation?

NAR: Have I since or before?

INT: Then or now?

NAR: Yeah. There's a song out now, well, in my opinion is kind of simple.

INT: Do you remember when you first heard it? Or where?

NAR: It was on the radio about a month or so ago.

INT: There was a couple of songs out. I think I know the one you are talking about, did it make you laugh or think about it at all? Did you tell anybody else about it?

NAR: They're trying to make a profit out of it, that's all. Commercialized the thing. Same with these t-shirts with the witty sayings so to speak.

INT: Did you tell anybody else about them?

NAR: No. I'm sure most everybody has seen them.

INT: When you think about it, why do you think there's so much joking going on? Why do you think there's so many people telling jokes?

NAR: Well, I suppose. Right now, it's pretty much to look back, maybe it's funny, probably at the time they're trying to cover up their anxieties.

INT: Do you remember any jokes from anything else like this? Like any t-shirts or stories or songs about it and that sort of thing.

NAR: No. But like I say, in any other disaster like this, I guess you could term this a disaster, a good loss of human life. This one was unique (unintelligible).

INT: Have you developed any sort of an opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: Well I still believe we need it. If they want to shut all the plants down tell the people they cannot have their air conditioners, they can't have color TVs, the only light, electricity they have is just for a couple of light bulbs so they can see. And they can shut them down. Otherwise we are going to have to have them.

INT: Do you think about what it might take? For nuclear energy.

NAR: If they need it? If we need it? We do need it, but you mean if they continue with it?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Let's hope they learned a few safety practices or technical aspects from Three Mile Island.

INT: Is there anything else that you think you'd like to say about it?

NAR: Like I said, I do believe that we, solar power is a long way down the road. We need something until then. Like I say, nuclear is going to be, as far as I can see it is the only way we can go for the next twenty-five, thirty years.

INT: So you'd like to see it go on, but safely.

NAR: Right, you know. Like I say they have learned some lessons down here surely. They can implement more safety practices, like technical aspects of the thing you would have overlooked before or unforeseen. Its, more safeguards can be built into the thing sure, but I surely believe we do need this.