

Date: 1979

Occupation: College employee

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

NARRATOR: The Wednesday before it all - I can't give you a specific date, but it was...I don't know, all this stuff came out on Wednesday . . . or Friday, and everybody was in an uproar here. And I heard it Wednesday in the Service Center.

INT: How did you hear it?

NAR: One of the professors was talking about it. And I hadn't even heard it on TV or anything.

INT: Did you know that Three Mile Island; that the reactor was at Three Mile Island before the incident?

NAR: Yeah. Yeah I knew that. And their nuclear bit down there. Yeah I knew it was there.

INT: Did you know how far away it was?

NAR: I knew it was on the other side of Harrisburg, I couldn't have gave you a specific mileage until it happened, and then I knew.

INT: What did you talk about when you first heard? Did you talk about anything in particular or think about anything?

NAR: I think after it started to get serious I thought about where I was going to go.

INT: Did you make any plans?

NAR: Well, I didn't pack. I mean, you know because I had the clothes that was on... I didn't actually pack a suitcase but I assumed that I would probably go towards Virginia, I have friends down there. And if I had to go farther, toward Florida, because I have friends down there.

INT: Did you think of anything that you would take with you?

NAR: Tanya.

INT: Other than Tanya?

NAR: Heidi, the dog. (laughing).

INT: Any other things at all?

NAR: Nothing ... well, like my insurance papers, stuff like that, if I could get them soon enough, you know.

INT: Did you think you'd be coming back once you left?

NAR: I guess it all depends on if it blew up. If it blew up, no.

INT: So you didn't think it was really all that serious when you first heard about it?

NAR: No, when I first heard about it, no. I was... I thought they'd just take care of it. But then I did, you know, start making a few plans, nothing really definite. I figure when

they told me to move, that's when I would move. I figure they knew more about it than what I did.

INT: And when did you start thinking it was serious?

NAR: When I heard the professors here at the college, the physics professors - talk about it.

INT: When was that, Friday?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: So then you did start looking for more information about it?

NAR: Oh sure, like I to read the paper' then and listened to the news, you know, kept the TV on so I'd hear all the broadcasts about it.

INT: So you paid more attention than you normally would?

NAR: Yeah, yeah I did.

INT: How did you feel about other people's reactions to the incident?

NAR: Some of them were too fast. I mean as soon as they said Three Mile Island, some of them just took off, and I thought that was a bit drastic. I mean, I don't anything about physics, nuclear power - I mean, you know - anything about how it reacts, how fast it can go. I know it can go really fast, but I figure if it's bad enough that they tell you to go, that's when I would go.

INT: How did you feel about the media's handling of the incident?

NAR: Poor.

INT: Poor? In what ways?

NAR: I think it was... I think right around... I wouldn't say it was poor right around this area, because, you know, they had it on TV every 5 minutes and they left you know what was going on. But I think people, like out in California, away from here, I think they thought that Pennsylvania had already blew up before it... (Laughing). That's just how it struck me, because lots of people would call. Like I have friends from out of state and they would call and say, "Get out of there right now before you blow up" and they were really excited about it. And I was excited but not too that point.

INT: What did you think of the government officials and their handling of the incident?

NAR: Let's see - that one I'm going to have to think on. I guess... I don't know, I guess they just did what the guys at the power plant told them to. They couldn't do anything else. I think that they should have told the people who were pregnant and the little kids - the ones that are going to be affected - "Get Out". I think they handled that well. I think if I would have lived closer with my little girl, if I'd been in that 5 mile radius, regardless of whether she was 6 or under, I would have taken her out, not for me, but for her. I would have worried more about her than me. Because she has her whole life to go through. More so than I do.

INT: And Met Ed, what do you think about that - How they handled this?

NAR: I don't think they actually handled it, they just took what they could and tried to get the less blame they could, I mean, it's their job. That's their plant there. They have the plant, and I think that... I just don't think they can shut it off and say "Well It's not our fault that this happened." I mean, granted there's not a lot of nuclear stuff that happens and yeah, people can make human mistakes and I see nothing wrong with that. But I don't think they should sit back and say, "Well it's not absolutely our fault and we shouldn't take the cost of it" well; I don't think the cost should be on us, either.

INT: Are you part of Met Ed then?

NAR: No. but I'm talking about people in general down there.

INT: Did you find anybody particularly reliable, someone that you trusted their word more than anyone else's?

NAR: What do mean, like a TV station, something like that?

INT: Anything, any kind of source of information that you may have run into.

NAR: Well, let's see. I just personally watched channel 21 because ... no, scratch that, channel 27. . . I just like the newscasters better on there and I guess that's why I had that on.

INT: Was there anybody in particular that you mistrusted?

NAR: Well, I don't... It's like I said, I think a lot of the broadcasters really blew it up too quick. Well, I shouldn't say too quick. I don't know how I feel about that. Because I think people got scared very fast. And I don't know, maybe they should have been scared very fast. Maybe I wasn't scared enough. Well, if it's going to blow up, you're going to blow up... I mean there's not...if it blows up you don't have time to get out anyway. I don't know. Maybe the government should have evacuated all around here. I have...

INT: Mixed emotions?

NAR: Mixed emotions about that, yeah. But this nuclear power, I mean, I don't know...in the years to come, if they can regulate it and stuff, that's a great way to get electricity. It's a lot cheaper. I don't really have anything against nuclear power, either, I mean, you know...

INT: Have you developed an opinion about it?

NAR: Well I never went into it. I just kind of take electricity . . . I just kind of take it for granted like a lot of people. And I know, like they use dams to get electricity and they use nuclear power to make electricity and I never thought about it one way or another but.. I think they should maybe investigate nuclear, I think if something like this happens, they should have it set up so that they can do something about it right away instead of...But then just look at Skylab, I mean they put that up in the air and it came down. They knew it was going to come down.

INT: Do you find a correlation there between Skylab and Three Mile Island?

NAR: The government point of view, yeah. I know one's outer space and one's here on earth, but the Government's behind, you know. They know the nuclear plant went up, they know that the space lab went up. And they knew that the space lab was coming

down. Why didn't they how and where and when and...you know. And they didn't. And why didn't they know that something could happen to this nuclear plant. Something could have been done about it. And maybe it is only one chance out of so many millions, but it still happened. I just think when there's people involved, there should be... You have to try it out. I don't know my Tanya in her later years, nuclear power will be great - fantastic then, if they keep it up and maybe it will really do good for them.

INT: Do you think they need to research it a little more?

NAR: Well I don't know, it's just like things with medicine and cancer and stuff, I mean there has to be some kind of guinea pig, for further... and like if they can...If I had cancer I think I would let them use the drug on me that they think might help. I just feel that way. Because when I'm supposed to die, I'll die anyway, regardless of what or how it's for.

INT: Did you feel at the time that those in charge were in control of the situation?

NAR: No.

INT: Why?

NAR: Because they never knew what was going to happen and when it was going to a happen. I think they probably gave the details they knew, but they didn't actually know that in the next hour the plant wouldn't blow up, or tell you what second it was going to blow up. They told you, you could evacuate if you felt it was necessary, but they didn't think it was necessary. You know that type thing. They don't know what's going on. They know what's going on, but they don't know for sure if it could happen. Sure it could happen. But they won't say, yes it's going to happen in an hour and 10 minutes and 33 seconds . . . you know.

INT: Do you still feel that way? You still believe that they didn't have control of the situation?

NAR: No, they didn't have control of...not actually control it. Well if they did, why did it take 2 weeks to get it cooled down and...?

INT: Do you think they are in control now?

NAR: With the reactor that was causing the trouble?

INT: Yes.

NAR: Yeah, I'm sure they have that under control now, because, well it's cooled down.

INT: What would you think they wouldn't have control of now?

NAR: I wouldn't know, but, I'm assuming that if they have thermometers and stuff like that to tell you if the thing's hot inside or not. I'm assuming if they look at one of them, assuming that the thing works, that they can tell if it's hot or cold. I don't know. I mean, it could have happened to the reactor next door to it too. But I think they closed the plant down, right?

INT: I believe so, I don't know if they have opened it up yet.

NAR: I don't think it's in use right now.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: More for my little girl than myself.

INT: So she was what had you the most worried?

NAR: Yeah, because I knew she was worried. I'm divorced, her dad lives down around Harrisburg, and I knew she was worried about it because he lives down there. And she was on more or less...like she'd hear the stuff on TV and I wanted her to hear it, that's just part of life and I feel that she shouldn't be...even though she is only 9 I don't want to scare her to death, but that's life and things like that happen. And I just more or less said, "Hey they're supposed to know what they are doing down there. They know more than what I do, if they say leave, we'll leave, if they don't say leave we'll stay."

INT: Did you make any plans different from what you ordinarily would have made?

NAR: No. I didn't stick close to home, if that's what you mean. I don't normally travel a lot, but I went to my parent's house, I did shopping just like I do, you know.

INT: You didn't change any of your ordinary routines, then?

NAR: Tanya didn't go down to her dad's place. She was with me. I might have kept her closer to me. Like if I went shopping, she went with me. And I think I probably did it, I would say I did it consciously. I just felt better, well anytime anything happens to me personally, I feel better if she's right there.

INT: So whenever you went anywhere you took Tanya with you?

NAR: I would say more or less, yeah, but then again, she more or less usually goes with me anywhere I go anyway.

INT: What did you do when you were at work?

NAR: Well she was in school. And I explained to her why they didn't let her go out to recess. And if anything would happen, if they would say go, that would be the first place I would go, to get her. And she was. . .you know...

INT: But you hadn't packed anything, so you didn't go?

NAR: No, I packed no clothes or anything. If that would have been the case, it wouldn't have, you know, you can get clothes anywhere. I don't...it's nice to have, I guess, but that wasn't my main thing. I don't think clothes are your main thing right then.

INT: Did you think you'd be coming back?

NAR: Well I guess it all depends if it blew - if it blew up, no. If it didn't blow up and they got it back, yeah, I'd have come back. The radiation goes down or up or whichever way the winds going - there's a bunch of factors for that. Yeah, I'd have come back if would of had a house to come to. It kind of scared me to think that if it did blow up that everything I had was here - my house, which I own, my job... financially I'm not set, but at least I eat and sleep and I'm under a roof, and that would have just disappeared. I mean, you'd had just had to start all over from scratch. And that I thought of that, after it really set in. I thought, that scares me. But what do you do?

INT: Yeah, the idea of starting over was frightening to you?

NAR: Not actually starting over, but starting over with nothing, starting over with Tanya to think about. If it had been myself, I wouldn't have been as, you know, I'd like security for Tanya. I like the security too, but I'm not afraid to...I wouldn't be afraid to move and start out going looking for a job. It's a little hard with a child.

INT: With her . . . okay.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was happening at Three Mile Island?

NAR: Just what they showed me on TV. I saw China Syndrome.

INT: During this period or afterward?

NAR: After. I'm glad I saw it after.

INT: Why?

NAR: Because I think I would have probably been more scared if I saw it before. It was just so coincidental, I mean . . . And I enjoyed the movie, and it didn't scare me when I saw the movie. As a matter of fact, I saw it shortly right after it happened; it might have been a week after it was calmed down.

INT: in Harrisburg?

NAR: No, I saw it in Washington, DC. I went away for the weekend. I still went, but this was after it all calmed down. And Tanya did not go then with me. And I saw it there. And I'm glad I saw it afterwards. I wanted to see it. It just seemed . . . I could just see all the men down there wearing rubber boots. And looking at this thing... (Laughing)

INT: Did you picture that before or afterwards, after you saw the movie?

NAR: After I saw the movie, that's when I... yeah. It was seeing stuff on TV. Because I was never even that close. I mean I knew the island was there and I knew there was things sticking up that you could see going by, but I didn't actually know what for type of plant it was or how. . . you know.

INT: Did you think that, do you think that anything that happened at TMI may have affected your health, either now or in the future?

NAR: No.

INT: How about that of Tanya?

NAR: As of now, no I don't think so. But that's just something that you're not going to be able to tell for ten and twenty years.

INT: What other aspects of your life may have been affected? Can you think of any?

NAR: Well my job. Everybody was excited here. There was a certain amount that was affected there. My mother was really upset. She gets upset very quickly about anything. But this naturally upset her...Tanya was very upset because of her dad. I don't... I think I was just upset generally the whole way through it. Everything I did...Well I shouldn't say that – I knew it was happening and it was on my mind a lot but I can't say that it upset my plans to the point that I didn't do anything, because it didn't.

INT: Did you have any concerns about the food or the milk from the area?

NAR: No, because I didn't think of that until after it was all over. That's funny...because toward the end of it I guess, when they started talking about the farmlands and stuff around there. I don't think I would've drank it...if I'd have known that our milk was coming from down around there, I don't think I would've drank it. Why...until they actually find out for sure, why do it? But that didn't hit me until I saw it on TV. I never even thought of food, that type thing.

INT: Did it stop you from eating it or drinking it, or was that after the main crisis had past?

NAR: No, it didn't stop me from it. If somebody said, "hey this is from down around TMI," I'd say ok just put it in the refrigerator and keep it for a while. But, no, I mean, I'd still cook with milk, we still drank milk, and stuff like that, because, we could've gotten milk from the other direction. I don't know where they get the milk.

INT: Did you picture any affects of radiation on the life around you?

NAR: No, but there again I really didn't know what to look for. I couldn't see anything different in my environment. When I look at the cloud, I don't know if there's any radiation in it or what. I'm not on the scientific mind category, I guess.

INT: Did you think of your own death at all?

NAR: No.

INT: That of others?

NAR: Yeah, Tanya. I worried about, not actually my death, I worry about what will happen to her if I die. Something like that, but it's not, it's like I said before, I could walk out in the street and get hit, and I don't think about that a lot naturally. But that can happen just as fast, or faster probably than the TMI thing.

INT: What kind of things did you think about when you were thinking something about timing of death?

NAR: If she died, I would've just as soon died before or at the same time. I don't know, that's kind of gruesome.

INT: Did you think of that at all?

NAR: About dying? No, because I figured if they tell me to go, I'd go. If they didn't tell me to go and it blew up, it would've been too late, so I didn't actually...

INT: Think that you might die. You pretty much thought that you would survive and so would Tanya?

NAR: I would say throughout the whole thing I figured we would survive. I didn't worry about death and of dying.

INT: And what reassured you? What made you believe you would survive?

NAR: I don't know, there's so many things that happen that's everyday life that people die or don't die. And I can't imagine myself dying in an automobile accident but yet I might tomorrow. And it's just something that I don't think about, you know. I can't imagine myself dying of cancer. I don't have it now, but who knows? Next week I might have it and die of it. I don't know, but why think about it?

INT: Did you think of god during the incident?

NAR: You mean more so than what I usually do?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Like I pray for God for Forgiveness or something like that?

INT: Or think that maybe God has something to do with it all, might have figured into all of this?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: Not any more than what I usually would.

INT: Did you pray about the incident at all?

NAR: No, because I don't think that's something you should pray about. I think ... I think they can be helped but I think if God puts the men there, I think that's the men that... I don't think that... that's something that I don't think, I don't think I should pray for a good life, I think I should pray for me to make life better. That type thing. That's just my own personal opinion.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities during the incident toward Tanya or (unintelligible)?

NAR: Sure. To Tanya, especially. If they'd say get out, she'd be the first person I'd go get. Or she would be right with me. The only times that I think she was away from me was like when I'd be at work and she'd be at school. But yeah, I felt responsibility there.

INT: Did you feel any responsibility toward work?

NAR: Well I came to work everyday. If they had said get out, I wouldn't have even thought about work.

INT: So you didn't see any conflicts there at all?

NAR: No. My first reaction would have been, get Tanya and go.

INT: Was your job or work at all affected by TMI?

NAR: People were excited in the service center. There was a lot of talk. I'd say more talk normally than what there is - which there usually is a lot. You could see some fear in people and others were - you know...

INT: What kinds of thing did you talk about?

NAR: Well mostly it was about the reactor itself. When they first found out about it, they'd come in and say, "Did you hear about Three Mile Island." And it was just "did you hear" and well then, a couple days would pass and they'd come in and say "Are you going to leave town, so and so left town, are you?" I think that was the main thing - are you going to leave town, or aren't you going to leave town.

INT: (Unintelligible) why you were staying or anything like that or why you might...?



NAR: Normally, no. It was are you or aren't you, yes or no. I don't know if they were taking a survey if so many people leave, I'll leave or... (Laughing)...I don't know.

INT: Did you have any things that you had to do that you otherwise normally wouldn't find that you had to do?

NAR: No.

INT: No? Okay. Did you have any ideas about how it would be best to behave in a situation like this?

NAR: Yeah, I think that you should be calm for one thing. I think... If I would live in Middletown, I might have reacted a lot different than what I did here. Especially with Tanya, like I said. If I had lived in Middletown with Tanya, I'd have got out. I might have only came this far, but I would have got out from right around there. At least that would have gave me a little head start if you had to evacuate. Just thinking about getting out, with that many people in Harrisburg, it would take hours to get out. It's a lot different story from here and from down there. Like I don't think I'd have as much trouble from here as right down there in the city, right around Harrisburg.

INT: So you were thinking of traffic jams and things like that?

NAR: Yeah, that type thing, yeah.

INT: Did the event bring to mind any past experiences of any kind?

NAR: I didn't think of anything in specific.

INT: You didn't think it was similar to anything that you had ever experienced?

NAR: No, because it wasn't...I never was in contact with...I knew it was there but I never, you know...that was my first experience with anything of that type. I heard about other places, you know, but I never experienced it. It's just like it rained that when we had all that flooding and stuff, well the only thing I could do about it - the water kept coming up, and the only thing I could do about that is do what they told me to and that's what I did during the flood.

INT: Did you find this more frightening that the flood?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Why?

NAR: I don't know... the flood I can evacuate, like I know I can get out if I leave in plenty of time. But like this could go like that (snapping fingers). And this is a little more crucial, it's a little more spontaneous, you don't exactly know what could happen. Where if water comes up, I mean I know I can swim and I know the house will float away, but I can get away if I leave. You know, it's not like a dam breaking or anything.

INT: You didn't find it similar to any kind of historical event?

NAR: I didn't think of that.

INT: Did you think of any TV shows or movies, books or stories that you may have read?

NAR: I thought about these outer space movies, just because it's so out of my realm that I didn't think of nuclear power as. And that's the a same way I watch these - like Star Trek

and them - I think, that's not going to be my day. I just kind of put it with space and I don't know why, I have no idea why.

INT: Something unknown, maybe?

NAR: Yeah, right, something unknown.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: Singing any songs? You mean to pass the time by or what? (Laughing)

INT: Did any songs start running through your mind or anything like that?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any daydreams at the time that you remember?

NAR: No I didn't daydream.

INT: How about sleeping dreams?

NAR: I didn't sleep as well because I went to bed later so I could hear the reports, I maybe got up a little earlier so I could put the reports on right away After I got to sleep I was fine, I don't remember dreaming anything.

INT: So it didn't disturb your sleep?

NAR: No, except I didn't sleep as long.

INT: Did you see any changes in the people around you?

NAR: Some of them disappeared. (Laughing)

INT: That would be a change. (Laughing)

NAR: I think they were a little more hyper in their every day life. Worrying about it, that type thing, the mouth went a little faster.

INT: Did it change them in any lasting way, do you think?

NAR: No, I think most people have forgotten about it by now. I mean, it's just something that happened and when it's there they're worried about it but now it's over and I don't think the majority of the people. . . Like if you say, "Do you want a nuclear plant next to your house?" I think most of them would probably say "No" right now. But I don't think it has affected their everyday lives.

INT: How about yourself, do you think it has affected you in any lasting way?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: I have thought about this and I can't think of one thing that I heard, just because you asked me. Yeah, there was lots of jokes, there was lots of one liners and two lines that was in and out of the service center. Right off hand I can't think of one, but there were a lot that I heard.

INT: Why do you think people were joking so much?

NAR: To ease the atmosphere. I don't know...It's better to laugh than to cry. If you're going to do one or the other, I would assume people would rather laugh.

INT: When you heard the jokes, did you find them funny?

NAR: Yeah, I'd say. Some of them were ridiculous funny. But some of them were comical, yeah. It was just about . . . a lot of them were how people would react to the situation. I wish I could remember some that...

INT: Do you remember any joking from things like Jonestown or Johnstown flood, Kennedy assassination, anything like that?

NAR: No. I don't, but I do know there was jokes. I don't know, maybe around Johnstown there were jokes about the flood that didn't come this far. You know what I mean? Maybe it's just an area thing. But I'm sure, like this nuclear thing was worldwide. Because if it is going to blow up, there's going to be a... I don't know, there might be a hole 6 feet deep or however deep here. And that just goes into the world and the world finds out about the 6 foot hole in Pennsylvania, or however deep it would have been. You know... I don't know, like the Johnstown flood, I mean there's flood all over this world, where this I think was something special as far as worldwide news.

INT: Did you develop an opinion about nuclear, something that you didn't think in the past?

NAR: I think you should be more cautious. I think, there again, it's like I said before. It's just like cancer drugs, any other kind of drugs, I mean somebody has to...I mean I don't want to blow up because of nuclear power, I mean it's not my idea that I would...I don't particularly want to die but I know someday I'll die, but that's just something you don't pick... Now if somebody says, "Do you want to blow up?" I'll say "No", and if somebody says, "Do you want to get run over by a car?" I'll say "No." (Laughing). But I don't see anything. I think if it is going to help in the future, I think there should be research in it. I think it should be used. I don't know, I think they should know what they're doing when they're doing when they're going to use it with this many people involved. I mean, like cancer there's one person involved. Where this, there's millions of people.

INT: Is there anything else you'd like to say, or anything you think I may have forgotten?

NAR: No, I can't think of any more.