

August 7, 1979

Occupation: Retired teacher (High School) and Librarian

INTERVIEWER: When did you first hear about the TMI incident?

NARRATOR: Over the radio, but I can't tell you what, I've truly forgotten exactly when... It was in March wasn't it, late March?

INT: Yes.

NAR: Well it must have been a few days following the beginning of the ruckus. Because I'm not a devotee of the radio or the TV to tell you the truth, so I think I didn't know it for a day or two after that.

INT: Did you know the reactor was there before the incident?

NAR: Oh yes.

INT: How far is TMI was from us?

NAR: Well frankly I thought it was closer than it turned out to be. I thought it was very close to Harrisburg, very. But my husband said that it's quite a distance down the river. I think as the crow flies I've learned since then that we're 23, 24, 25 miles from it.

INT: What did you think or talk about at the point when you first heard it? What were your thoughts at that time?

NAR: Well, of course my husband and I were concerned about it. We were never panicky. We never really thought of leaving although our married daughter who lives down in Maryland phoned, when she knew of it, and wanted us to come down there. But we said oh no, not unless this so called bubble that they kept discussing, this bubble burst, we don't think we will I suppose the reason we weren't panicky is that, I believe most people know that the news media of course exaggerates so terribly that we just had a feeling that it wasn't quite as bad as we had heard. But I suppose if it had burst we would have gone to Maryland.

INT: So you didn't think it was a crisis situation?

NAR: We didn't think so, no.

INT: Did you seek out further information then?

NAR: Well, no I don't really think we did. Of course the college even at that time was giving forth information, you know, regularly. The professors who are interested were probably on the scene, and so forth. And of course the radio was just giving you

information hour by hour. We didn't seek any others; I guess we thought we had the latest, being so near you know. It was probably as new as you could get.

INT Did you talk about it with family and friends?

NAR: Yes, neighbors and friends. Of course that was the main topic at that time. We had a few neighbors on the street who left too. We have one neighbor two doors down, who is from New York State and they have a married daughter who lives in the Harrisburg area who has two very small children. Because of this they were concerned, and because they still have very close relatives in New York State they did leave and take these small children up there. But I don't know of any other friends of ours or neighbors who really left. OF course no one on this street has any small children, really.

INT: What kinds of things were you and your friends saying about the incident?

NAR: Well, I suppose it was the degree of radiation that we were all worried about. And whether or not we felt we could believe what was being said. And of course our town here had organized a committee which began to a study and plan for routes of escape for the citizens and so forth. And we did definitely, I think everyone was talking about that, you know just what we would do in case.

INT: Did your attitude change at all from the first time you heard it through time.

NAR: While there was still danger or after the whole thing was over?

INT: While there was still danger.

NAR: No, I don't think it did. I suppose there were some newscasts that may have frightened me a little more than others. I don't mean to imply that I wasn't at all frightened, you know. I mean you have to after all about what you read of radiation and so forth, and how horrible we know it could be and so forth. You have to have a certain amount of fear. But I don't think it changed, no?

INT: How did you feel about others reactions to the incident?

NAR: Other people's?

INT: Yes.

NAR: Well, I felt that many were panicky and wouldn't have needed to be. However I sympathized with our neighbors and their tiny grandchildren. Which I think I would have done too, definitely, had mine been near enough. But I didn't see any point in panicking here in Carlisle, and leaving until they said that we must.

INT: Did you follow radios or newspapers or TV reports of the incident?

NAR: Yes. All of those.

INT: Do you remember any particular sources?

NAR: Well we aren't on the cable, so our chief source is 21 and 27. We don't usually bother with any other because it's never every clear. One's Harrisburg and one's Lancaster. So those would be it.

INT: How about Newspapers, which newspaper did you follow?

NAR: Well we get Harrisburg papers everyday, and of course our local Sentinel and those we followed.

INT: Did you pay any more attention to these than usual?

NAR: Yes I think I did. Fact it came to a point, I mean after the thing was over the danger was over that you became so sick and tired of reading it. Even now I just scarcely read anything about it anymore because I just get a little bit tired of it. This past weekend though I did read an article in the Sunday Patriot News which I thought was rather enlightening. And that was that they had decided that the whole affair was, now how did they put it, was not to be considered as a crisis, they didn't say of great importance, of extraordinary importance. It was not to be considered as such, after all the information was in I mean, and for this reason many of the suits that are pending I guess in court, legal suits, probably would be very, very greatly affected by this announcement that it was not to be considered an extraordinary event. That one rather interested me because that was the first I'd read anything like that.

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

NAR: Well, I thought it was, oh...just as exaggerated as usual I guess. I did hear, and I've forgotten his name it started with a D, the man who was head of this Nuclear Commission.

INT: Denton?

NAR: Denton, that's right. I did of course listen to his, and I felt that his were down to earth. But the rest of them I didn't feel were.

INT: How did you feel about the government officials handling of it?

NAR: You mean later or at the time?

INT: At the time.

NAR: Well, I can't say that I thought too much about that at the time. Of course I've read since that it wasn't well handled at any time, I guess we all know that now. At the

time I probably didn't know whether it was being handled properly or not. I felt as long as those commissioners were here, well I don't know if any other than Denton were or not, whether he was the only one here or not, but I think that I felt that if he was here, certainly he ought to be able to take care of the situation. My husband and I both thought that since the federal government was involved that they certainly would handle the situation to the best of their ability. I think that was the reason we didn't panic.

INT: How did you feel about Met Ed's handling of the situation, Metropolitan Edison?

NAR: Well, at the time I really can't say that I knew. Although as we read in the papers and heard that they were supposed to have known that there were defects and flaws and so forth in the equipment long before this crisis came about. And I know as I read that I thought that that is absolutely ridiculous if they did know, if this is true and not exaggerated reporting, if they knew this then I felt that they were very very guilty.

INT: Was there anyone that you found particularly reliable or that you trusted more than anyone else?

NAR: Who was reporting news? Anyone that was reporting news.

INT: Anyone that you were getting information from?

NAR: Well, I suppose this man Denton; I guess I figured that he should know.

INT: Was there anyone that you particularly mistrusted?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: Well evidently they weren't, from what I read. Apparently they if what I read is true, apparently they were not as well informed those who were handling it and it seems that they did not know, oh it's been so long ago now I'm afraid I can't talk very intelligently about it. They had a back up cooling system of some sort and when this reactor button showed which meant danger I suppose, it always does, and when their cooling system was put on and it didn't work, and so forth. Did not cool it down then I really began to wonder what was going on. That if the back up system wasn't working that surely more could or should have been done. Or that should have been known and checked ahead of time if it wasn't capable of taking care of such a situation. Perhaps they weren't checking it often enough to know that it was working.

INT: Are they in control now do you think?

NAR: Well, I certainly hope so. After all of this. Frankly, I'm not sure. Are the other reactors operating, am I allowed to ask you questions during this interview, if not I'll just scratch that. I'm not really sure; there were three reactors to the best of my knowledge.

This was reactor number two; I think that had the crisis. I just do not know whether the others have been stopped since. I really don't know that.

INT: I don't have any special information, all I know is what I read too and that kind of thing, we aren't specially informed, but do feel free to ask questions at any time during the interview as I said.

NAR: I just don't know either, and I know that Med Ed has tried to; they've had this big argument to see whose going to pay for all of this. And they are trying to get their consumers to help pay for it so that would lead me to think that evidently they are still supplying some of their customers if they are attempting to get them to help them to pay. If they had no customers and the whole business was shut down then I don't think there would be such a situation. I'm really not very well informed on that.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: Mildly, yes.

INT: What worried you the most about it?

NAR: Cancer. Cancer from the radiation.

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

NAR: My husband and I both thought along this line just a little bit, if we have to leave in a great hurry what would be the main things that we would take from the house. You know, if you fell in a great hurry what would we consider the most important things that it would be possible for us to take.

INT: What did you decide?

NAR: Well, I don't know what my husband had decided. I and I can't say that I was too careful about what I thought about either. I looked among my jewelry and so forth. We never keep any great sums of money in the house. I felt that perhaps certain jewelry I would take and other than that and a few mementoes, I felt that other than that I probably would not attempt to take anything. Of course we would have to take some clothes; I would pack a suitcase and grab a few things out of necessity. But I had no thought of attempting to grab furniture of certain kinds; we have a station wagon, and pack those in the back. I just had no thought of that.

INT: What did you think about leaving the area?

NAR: Temporarily you mean?

INT: Yes.

NAR: Well, I thought that would be a most unfortunate thing because if we had to leave, I knew that we wouldn't leave unless there was a real crisis, and if there was a real crisis if there was contamination everywhere I thought that would be a dreadful predicament to come back to because all of your possessions would have been exposed to the radiation and I thought that of course would make a dreadful situation.

INT: What brought you to stay?

NAR: Well, just the fact that we felt probably that the government did have it under control. I guess it was fifty fifty hope and felt that they did.

INT: Was there someone in your life that you were watching in order to decide that decision to make?

NAR: Well, no. I guess not. We have only one child and that's our daughter down in Maryland and we would have gone to her. We have no other close relatives in the area at all.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was happening at TMI? Or what might happen?

NAR: Well, not exactly because outside of the three big smoke stacks that you can see from the banks of the Susquehanna, I really had no idea what was there. They kept talking about the control room and I suppose everyone pictures a small room full of equipment. But what it looked like of anything I had no idea.

INT: Do you think anything that happened at TMI might have affected your health?

NAR: I doubt it, if what we have read is true because from all that I have read the number of, is it- millirhems, I think that's the measurement they used, the number of millirhems was supposed to be so low at the area and then of course we being some twenty miles away. I ... I don't know, I've always had a feeling that probably we were safe.

INT: How about in the future? Do you think we will find any affects?

NAR: I imagine the people in the area will have some, yes. I mean within a ten mile area would be the most danger of that sort of thing.

INT: What do you suppose those affects will be?

NAR: Well, other than cancer I don't know of any other affects that we have to worry about. Unless It can cause other diseases, well, I just don't' know. I think cancer is the thing that everybody dreads. I don't think I've ever read about any other...trying to think...of course definitely there are economic disadvantages. You didn't mean that though, you meant form a health stand point.

INT: Well how about the affects on the community?

NAR: Well, yes definitely, I think it has already and it will have some economic affects because many businesses we read in our local paper had already felt the fact that visitors and tourists and so forth were staying away this summer. Very much more so than otherwise. In the entire area that was very true from an economic standpoint. I have not really heard of people moving out of the area permanently, but I have a few times read that people who had contemplated moving into the area have not done so. So population-wise maybe that would have some affect too.

INT: Did you have any concern about the food or milk in the area?

NAR: No, not here.

INT: Did you picture in your mind any affects of radiation on the life around you? Say if the worst had happened?

NAR: Well, no I guess I didn't. I don't believe that I did.

INT: Did you think of your own death?

NAR: Immediate you mean, or long range?

INT: Immediate.

NAR: No, no not immediate. I felt that there was always a possibility if things got out of hand that we might contract cancer and so forth and so on.

INT: But it was an immediate threat to you?

NAR: No, I think even that is not supposed to be immediate, I mean unless you were very directly and closely involved I don't know about the employees and so forth that would have been right there. But they always talk about this in a certain period of years you would begin to notice.

INT: How about the death of others?

NAR: Well, it's always possible, yes. In fact, if this bubble had burst and it had become very, very serious...of course I even though a great deal about our daughter and her family down in Maryland because that isn't that far away that if the bubble had burst and worst had come to worst, I imagine that they would have had to flee too. So I did definitely think of that. I have no other relatives really that close really, I have some in New Jersey but I don't know whether that was considered close enough or not.

INT: Did you think you would survive?

NAR: Yes, I thought so. (laughter)

INT: What reassured you?

NAR: Well, I guess just faith and hope in the powers that were controlling the plant.

INT: Did you think of God during the incident?

NAR: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we're believers in God. I'm sure that I said many prayers during that time too. That I did whenever there's a catastrophe I know of I always try to include it in my prayers, so I did it then too.

INT: What did you pray for?

NAR: Well, I prayed that those who were in charge would be able to avert the greater catastrophe and people would therefore be saved.

INT: How did God figure in all of this? Do you feel he had a controlling hand?

NAR: Well, I don't feel that God created catastrophes. I don't now; I don't say I'm right. But I don't think that God created that catastrophe, no. I think that was human error that created that, and I don't ever blame those things on God. Of course, I guess it's true that people can be punished by those things and I don't know if God allows them to be punished in this way or not. I don't know, I don't feel that God created the trouble however, that I do not.

INT: Did any biblical stories or events or saying cross your mind at that time?

NAR: No, I think not.

INT: Did the idea of Satan or the last judgment or the end of the world enter your mind?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you or do you now consider the incident at TMI as related in any way to God and his instructing or disciplining of mankind?

NAR: Well, I'm sure many people do. I think it is possible, I think it is possible to feel that perhaps this was a good thing to have happened, even though as I say, I can't blame God for it. I think however it was a good thing to have happened and if God was responsible, I mean if that is so that he was responsible for having it happen to teach man a lesson then in that way there could be a tie in.

INT: Did you attend a religious service during the crisis?



NAR: Well, we usually go to church I suppose we did, yes.

INT: Did anyone speak about TMI there?

NAR: I'm sorry I cannot remember but I think, I think that our minister did, yes. I seem to have a vague recollection.

INT: Were there fewer or more or the same number of people there? Do you remember?

NAR: I think it was the same. I don't remember.

INT: Did the attendance at the service change your thought or feelings on the incident? Were you that aware of the attendance?

NAR: No, I don't think it did.

INT: What does your own faith say about the rightness or wrongness of man's desire to use and control atomic power?

NAR: Man's right to did you say, was that the way it was put?

INT: Yes.

NAR: Well, I feel that if God has allowed man to know these things, and of course we all know that God gave man a mind to use, and since it has extended far enough for man to be able to create all of these things, scientific things, I figure that God has given man the right to do this. Yes, I think of course God has always expected man to use thing rightly and not wrongly and we all know that man does not do that. Of course, when dynamite was discovered it was the very same thing all over again. There again dynamite is a wonderful thing in many many ways, but it is a terrible thing in many ways, and the same is true with nuclear power. It can be and is a wonderful thing when used rightly and a terrible thing when used wrongly. There again, God gives man a mind to decide the difference between right and wrong and I think that he feels that since we have been given that right and that power that we should use it.

INT: Do you think that nay religious persons or institutions should make any public stand either for or against the human development or use of atomic power?

NAR: Well, I think they have a perfect right to, yes. It's a serious enough thing that I feel certainly will take a stand, and of course, we all know that we do make a stand. I've never been in favor of these ridiculous demonstrations that go on all the time for and against this that and the other thing. Simply I mean in the way in which they carry them off. But I think they have a right to do. Whichever side they're on I think they have a right too.

INT: What position should they take?

NAR: Well, I believe that nuclear power is a thing at least we are told that it is a thing we really need in the future, because we need that source of energy. Since man has used up the other sources of energy or is about to and we actually need nuclear power or will need it in the foreseeable future I don't think it should be given up but I would hope that we are able to control it in the future.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities during the incident?

NAR: No, I'm afraid I didn't. Well, yes, in one way. I am afraid that it was very very minimal, very small. We have a few friends, no relatives living where we thought it was close enough to be much more dangerous than here, and we did invite a family to come and stay with us if they wished to during that time. However, they also have their own family in the Northern part of the state and they went there instead. But that much we did, which wasn't very much I realize. We didn't do anything else that I know of. Well, up the street here these neighbors who had these other children for a while they had the children here and then they took them to New York and during the time they had them here we offered beds and bed clothing or anything...that's a very small thing to do but that was about the only responsibility I think we tried to assume.

INT: Was your job or work affected by TMI?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have things to do which you otherwise wouldn't have had to do?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have ideas about how it would be best to behave in such a situation? Such as moral or ethical or religious ideas?

NAR: Well, if you mean if there had been a mass escape or something of that sort?

INT: Well, just with the feelings of panic and fear going on around you?

NAR: Well, we just tried to remain calm. I think we did.

INT: Was there anything that made it difficult for you to behave in this way?

NAR: No, not really. Perhaps if everyone around us had panicked, you know, then that might have made it worse. But no one did so.

INT: At the time did this event bring to mind any past experiences or past events?

NAR: No.

INT: Did anything like this ever happen to you before, or in history?

NAR: You mean any great crisis? You don't mean anything of a nuclear nature you mean anything of a serious crisis?

INT: Well, anything that would have brought some sort of memory to you during this incident?

NAR: No, I guess not.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Was this incident more or less frightening than say a flood or a hurricane or a war?

NAR: Well, of course we don't have to worry about floods around here so I have never really been subjected to danger by flood. In 1972 we had two and a half feet of surface water in our basement. But that was not anything that frightened us at all. It was just surface water. No, I have never really been subjected, I have never been in danger or fire or flood or anything of that nature. I've been very fortunate.

INT: Did any TV shows or movies come to mind?

NAR: Well, this China Syndrome I thought of that of course. And strange to say my daughter and her husband who didn't even know about the TMI incident at the time, until it became public down there which was perhaps a day or two after it did here, they had just gone to see that movie that very night when the news went on the air at least down there. And when they came home that night and flipped on the TV they said for a few moments they were quite panic-stricken for just having seen this. And of course they know how close we are to Harrisburg and so forth and immediately put in the call for us to come. But we hadn't seen the film at all and still haven't seen it. Now I may not have answered that question directly, I forget just how that question was put.

INT: Did any movies or TV shows come to mind?

NAR: Well, only the fact that I had read in the papers that this China Syndrome was of that nature.

INT: Did any books or stories come to mind?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: (laughter) I'm not a singer.

INT: A the time did you have any daydreams that you remember?

NAR: No, I don't remember really.

INT: Have you had any since?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams at the time?

NAR: Well, if I did I don't recall, so I guess I did not.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed in any way?

NAR: I'm a very poor sleeper at best so it could be possible that I found it a little more difficult to get to sleep those nights. I just don't remember. But I'm a rather poor sleeper.

INT: What changes happened to the people around during the incident?

NAR: Well, nothing, really except this one family, no one else in our area that I know of made any attempt what so ever to leave or to move. One family across the street was urged by a brother and his family who lived somewhere in the New England states, urged them to come but they felt like we did that it just wasn't necessary.

INT: Do you think the incident damaged you in any lasting way?

NAR: No.

INT: How about others around you?

NAR: I doubt it. I couldn't say for sure about this one family with the small children, but I doubt it.

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

NAR: Yes, I'm sure, I can't recall any of them now, but yes there was quite a bit of banter about it.

INT: Did you see any posters or graffiti?

NAR: Yes, cartoons in the paper from time to time and so on.

INT: Did you hear nay new words or funny remarks that were new to you?

NAR: I don't recall. I read a very interesting account that to me was most informative in the Sunday Patriot News at that time on the (tape switch)

INT: Do you remember any other joking form other crisis like the Kennedy assassinations or Pearl Harbor or the invasion of Cambodia or Johnstown or Guiana?

NAR: Do you mean if I can remember specifically joking at that time? I can't say that I remember anyone but I feel very certain that there were. But I can't recall.

INT: Why do you think they were joking at those times and at this time?

NAR: Well, perhaps psychologically an attempt to counteract gloom and so forth that hangs over people at that time. They may feel that humor will help alleviate the situation. I don't know.

INT: Have you developed an opinion on nuclear energy?

NAR: Not other than what I said a moment ago that I feel from what I read that we do need it for the future. I feel that we do but I feel that it certainly must be controlled very carefully.

INT: Is there anything else you want to say about all of this?

NAR: No, I guess I've said it. I think you've given me plenty chance to say it.