

August 9, 1979

Occupation: Business manager

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

NARRATOR: Very shortly after it happened on the radio or TV, I don't remember.

INT: Do you remember what your first impression was?

NAR: No, not really.

INT: Like do you remember if you were very concerned about it or it was just sort of a passing thing that happened on the radio?

NAR: I don't remember.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: And how long had you been aware of that?

NAR: Since the beginning of its construction. Whenever construction began and I was in the area, I was aware because I fly fairly often and I would see the construction.

INT: Were you ever concerned about it being there?

NAR: No.

INT: Are you concerned about it now?

NAR: No.

INT: All right.

NAR: With reservations.

INT: At the end I'll ask you a question about how you feel about nuclear power. Also at the end, when you know what you've said, I'll ask you permission if we can use the material so... When you heard about it did you keep your ear out for more information on it?

NAR: Yes, yes. I was very interested in it.

INT: What sources did you go to, do you remember? Like newspaper or...

NAR: Initially, the local radio and then I looked at it on the TV and then the only source that I finally believed in was the actual news conferences held by Harold Denton. I found that their interpretation by the media did not necessarily reflect what I heard though the full length live press conferences.

INT: What did you think of media coverage in general?

NAR: It didn't always resemble Harold Denton's comments, I thought they would tend to dramatize, emphasize, specific points to make the situation as news worthy as possible.

INT: So did you feel they were exaggerating it as sort of to make it into a news item?

NAR: I wouldn't want to say exaggeration but I would say that they picked the points and used the words to suit the purpose of making it as exciting as possible.

INT: What was your opinion of Met. Ed. at the time?

NAR: They have a very difficult job to do.

INT: Did you trust what they were saying? Would you use them as a major source of information?

NAR: No.

INT: O.K., so Denton was your, your primary source of information.

NAR: Only live. Only live and full coverage.

INT: What did you think about Denton?

NAR: He sounded like he was giving very square facts. He presented a good balance, as far as I was concerned. He wasn't somebody's PR man. He didn't sound like he was in the company's pocket as being strictly PR, and he wasn't trying to play into the media's hands.

INT: So what did you think about government handling of the incident, in general? If you want you can give a differentiation between national and state or a generalization over the whole thing.

NAR: I felt that the local governments had some very difficult choices to make and had to react to political pressure. The state government also I think dealt with it as much from a political standpoint as a scientific standpoint. However, again, there were some very difficult choices to make and the implications of each choice. I am very glad I didn't have that choice to make.

INT: Were you satisfied with the way they handled it?

NAR: You can't, at this point in time you can't argue with the results and I didn't try to second guess them at the time. It's Monday morning.

INT: It's Monday?

NAR: The game's over. Monday morning quarterback?

INT: OHHH! (laughs)

NAR: It's Monday morning, we can all be, we can be real good at that now. But at the time I was comfortable.

INT: Yeah, we are trying to do it as much at the time as possible.

NAR: It is difficult to do that.

INT: We are aware of it, that is why I put the date on the top.

NAR: Fine.

INT: Did you talk about it with your friends?

NAR: I think during that week or two it was the only topic of conversation for all practical purposes.

INT: What seemed to be their attitudes towards it?

NAR: It varied from person to person. Many people were extremely concerned. You know, it just varied, I...

INT: So it ran the whole gamut?

NAR: It ran the whole gamut. I would say serious concern would be my interpretation of their feelings.

INT: While the whole thing was going on did you feel that the people in charge of the situation were in control of it? That they had a hold on what was going on there?

NAR: To the limits of their knowledge.

INT: What reassured you about that?

NAR: There seemed to be steady progress toward a comfortable solution. That is about all I can say.

INT: Do you think that they are in control right now?

NAR: Yes. Yes.

INT: Were you ever worried about the situation?

NAR: Yes.

INT: What worried you the most?

NAR: I was concerned that because the situation had never fully happened before and there were a great many unknowns and some very difficult choices to make, that some mistakes or further problems would develop that couldn't be controlled.

INT: Did you make any plans different from what you would have ordinarily have made during the whole thing?

NAR: The only things that we did... We made sure that both tanks of gas were full on our two vehicles. We got some important papers together and decided that if an evacuation was ordered that we knew where we were going to go and that Lynn and the children would leave immediately and that we would meet eventually at my home in Oil City.

INT: And why would you stay behind? Why...

NAR: I have a responsibility at work for an orderly shutdown. And I would not want to jeopardize their leaving in any manner, by a moment if that was what was necessary.

INT: Did you, did you pack up the cars at all?

NAR: No.

INT: Would you have waited until they ordered an evacuation to leave from this area? Or say if they had had an evacuation from the five mile limit, would you have gone, sent them away then?

NAR: Probably not. I would not have sent them away. If they wished to go I probably would have permitted it. But we had not, no, we had not said any of those what ifs. Strictly if an evacuation was ordered.

INT: Did you change any of your ordinary routines during the whole thing?

NAR: No, I think the Friday night when it was one of the more serious times, it was the first Friday night of the incident, we had a dinner party here.

INT: Did most of the guests who were invited show up?

NAR: Yes, I think they all showed up. The only thing out of the ordinary we tried to listen to part of a news conference around 10:30 or so.

INT: Was talk of the Three Mile incident, did that dominate the evening at all?

NAR: Oh, absolutely.

INT: What sort of things were discussed? What sort of an attitude?

NAR: Individual reactions, what some of their friends had done, what friends in Harrisburg had done, what all the terms meant, what everybody thought they meant, what it was all about.

INT: Did people seem to be pretty aware of what was going on?

NAR: Oh yes, oh yes.

INT: Okay... Did you have any mental pictures of what was going on over at TMI or what might happen?

NAR: Only from the pictures of the reactor and whatever I could conjure up as what a meltdown might look like, the ultimate catastrophe.

INT: And what sort of thing did you conjure up?

NAR: An awful lot of steam coming out of the ground.

INT: Was this steam any particular color?

NAR: White, just like steam.

INT: Did you picture steam coming over as far as Carlisle, or was it more of a generalized vision at the plant?

NAR: It was probably no higher in my mind than any parabolic cooling tower discharge.

INT: Were you worried about the effects of the radiation at all? And if, say if the worst had happened and I am assuming that that is a meltdown right now, did you have any idea of what the effects would be on the people?

NAR: I know vaguely what can happen with radiation poisoning and its ultimate effects. I know there are some genetic effects or cancer causing effects and that the ultimate would be that the area was so contaminated that we could never return to our home. And that possibility went through my mind. The possibility that I could never return to work.

INT: Was, did you think about that a good deal or was it just a passing thought?

NAR: I certainly wasn't preoccupied with it.

INT: Did you have any idea how it would affect the environment if the worst had happened? Did you have any thoughts about that?

NAR: Only that I couldn't return to the area, I guess was the worst thing.

INT: Do you think that your health may have been affected?

NAR: No.

INT: Have you worried about drinking any of the milk from the area or eating any of the food?

NAR: No. Not once.

INT: Did you ever think about your own death?

NAR: I don't think so.

INT: Or what about the death of anyone else?

NAR: No. I guess the only thoughts of death that occurred would be the possibility of death and turmoil and chaos if an evacuation was ordered.

INT: What did you think that would be like? How would you describe it? Did you?

NAR: Probably one of the maddest traffic jams you could ever get into. All going in one direction.

INT: Did you feel that traffic would be moving?

NAR: Very slowly, sort of like going to Penn State forever, to the football game.

INT: Did you think about that relationship at the time?

NAR: Not the Penn State thing, yeah I guess I did because I pictured. Having been on 322 going to a game at Penn State we are out in the middle of nowhere and stopped. That's kind of why that was the picture I brought to mind.

INT: Did you relate, during the whole thing, did you relate it back to anything you have experienced during your life? Say another crisis?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you think of any historical events?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any images like Hiroshima?

NAR: No, not at all. I didn't envision that at all.

INT: Did you think of any books or movies?

NAR: No, I had only heard about The China Syndrome and how close it was to the fact. But at the time I had not seen any previews of it or knew anything about it.

INT: Did any songs run through your mind?

NAR: Yeah, a couple folk songs. "What Have They Done to the Rain" And folksongs by Fred Martin and Neil Young that has implicit-- I forget the exact details of the song, "Red are the Flowers".

INT: Do you know why they ran through your mind or...?

NAR: They were songs about radiation. About the bomb. And the effects of nuclear contamination.

INT: Would you say the incident was more frightening than say a flood or a hurricane or some other natural event? Or less frightening than that?

NAR: I wouldn't put it into the same category except it had some very permanent implication in that it could be many, many years before you could even begin to return to rebuild what you ever had. Where even a flood only lasts for a limited period of time. It may destroy everything but you could come back in a week and begin to rebuild, so to speak. That was the only difference. I guess that is why I would consider it to be more serious.

INT: Was your job or your work affected by Three Mile Island at all?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any trouble with workers not coming in?

NAR: I only know of one man that didn't come in to work.

INT: That is a pretty good record.

NAR: There may have been more now, I can only think of one.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities during the incident? You mentioned there was one you had to your job in case something had happened and how you would meet up with your family later on. Did you feel that there was any conflict there, in yourself over what to do?

NAR: No, I felt that the big thing was to make sure that the children would get away because of any implications with possible birth defects for their children. I didn't feel that I would be fathering any more children so there was no genetic risk. Then the only risk was to me personally and I felt that distance and time. Distance from Three Mile Island and time would be available that I could follow with that risk.

INT: Did you feel you had any other special responsibilities?

NAR: I felt I had a responsibility that if an evacuation was ordered to have an orderly shut down at work.

INT: Did you have any ideas about how it would be best to behave in this situation? As the whole thing went on. For example like ethical or moral beliefs, like use yourself as a model so that other people could see how calm you were?

NAR: Yes, I felt it was my responsibility to my family and those at work to show a serious concern, to be sure that I was aware of what was going on, to be prepared but not to panic.

INT: Was it difficult for you to do that?

NAR: No. Because that was the way I felt.

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

NAR: I don't remember.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams or was your sleep disturbed?

NAR: No. (laughs) My sleep is rarely disturbed. If you'd like to see an example give me five minutes and I will go to sleep.

INT: What changes happened around you, to people around you during the incident? Did they change from how they normally would be?

NAR: I guess some people got a little nervous but they are in my estimation people who in my estimation get nervous or react to situations rather emotionally, take extreme steps. I know some people at work who sent their families out of town. But it is the kind of reaction I expect from them.



INT: So it follows along pretty much their known personality?

NAR: Yeah, yeah. If it gets hot in the kitchen it's a real problem for them.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: Can you remember any of them?

NAR: Just, the funniest one to me was when you're asked where you live now you don't say Carlisle, you say twenty five miles west of Three Mile Island and you'll have no more trouble identifying where you are from.

INT: That's true. When did you hear that one?

NAR: I guess it was very shortly after it happened.

INT: That's a nice practical one.

NAR: All the corny little quips about you're glowing I felt weren't very amusing or very true, I guess. So that's about all I can remember hearing.

INT: At the time were you passing on jokes? Like you were saying that...

NAR: Oh yes, I think I was. I often have a couple jokes that I am commenting on. I enjoy them, jokes.

INT: Do you know why, do you have any idea why people were joking during the situation? Do you think there was any particular reason?

NAR: Oh, I think it was just to relieve tension.

INT: Do you remember any joking from other crises or other events?

NAR: Jokes go from the crisis of the crucifixion all the way up to every incident that happens. I don't know where you would stop.

INT: Okay, but they do exist, though?

NAR: Oh, yeah.

INT: Did you think about God at all during the incident?

NAR: Yeah, I prayed that the people would be given the wisdom and the power, the talent necessary to control it and that no one would be hurt.

INT: Did you feel that God intervened in any way directly during the incident?

NAR: I feel He intervenes directly everyday in everything so why should this be any different.

INT: Let me put it in a different way, then. Do you think He caused the incident or caused it to stop?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any biblical images come through your mind, any comparisons?

NAR: No.

INT: Like I know some people mentioned the Last judgment, did you ever think of anything like that?

NAR: No.

INT: Or that Satan caused it?

NAR: No.

INT: Then you felt it was man's doing? Is that what you are saying?

NAR: It was an accident due to a whole combination of events.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: That was, that was your regular Roman Catholic Service?

NAR: Right, regular Catholic Services.

INT: And did anyone talk about TMI during it?

NAR: Prayers were offered at the alter because of it.

INT: Did the prayers make you feel any better, just because they were offered?

NAR: No, because I, it was a subject of prayer anyhow and it was just a continuation of it.

INT: So, it wasn't just a special soothing thing because it was mentioned there?

NAR: No, I guess the nicest thing was to know was that the church is still continuing to try to be aware of today's problems and not off in never never land. That was the only reason I was grateful for hearing the prayers.

INT: I know some of the churches in the area didn't mention it at all in the services.

NAR: No, it was mentioned.

INT: Was attendance about the same as usual during the service?

NAR: No, I thought the Sunday attendance was remarkably lower. I don't remember what it was on Saturday. I don't remember whether it was more or less. But I do remember Sunday morning being definitely less, as I recall.

INT: Does your faith say anything about the rightness of wrongness of man's use of atomic power?

NAR: No. It doesn't. I don't know. There may be some remark about it if it is it is just approving that there is no... I know of no comment about it not being acceptable.

INT: Do you think the church should take a pro or con stance on nuclear power?

NAR: ...I guess they could. I don't see where it is absolutely necessary. They have the right to say what they want about anything, really.

INT: Do you have any opinion on nuclear power?

NAR: Oh, yeah. I think it is a source of power which we will have to learn to use.

INT: Does it worry you at all to use it?

NAR: Yes, it's a concern.

INT: But it...?

NAR: Mostly what to do with the nuclear waste. We have some educational problems and some technological problems to be concerned with. We have problems with basic moral honesty with the people that built them and I felt that before I saw The China Syndrome. Because I am familiar with bureaucracies. I am familiar with state and regulatory agencies and their inspections. I have worked for a foundry so I was well aware of some of the technological implications of valve bodies, castings, the unknowns of radio graphing. All those technical foundry controls of making a descent valve. I am

aware of them, I don't use them. Our foundry doesn't make valves but I'm aware of them, the scope of problems at least.

INT: So you have some idea of what was going on when they were talking about valve failure and things like that?

NAR: Oh, yeah. We always tease the foundry people that make nuclear valves that they are not selling valves, they are selling paperwork. Because I think there is more weight in paper than there is in valves.

INT: Hmm. Do we have your permission to use this material?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Is there anything you would like to add?

NAR: I hope that our country can be wise enough and the industry to be wise enough to educate the people using it to use available technology and get Three Mile Island back on the line.

INT: It looks like they are going to.

NAR: Good.

INT: Okay.