

August 9, 1979

Occupation: Housewife

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

NARRATOR: Probably the same day, but I don't remember exactly what time during the day.

INT: And do you remember where you heard it from? Was it a news media or a friend?

NAR: Probably over the radio and then of course it was a topic of conversation at dinner time.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did it worry you at all that it was there?

NAR: No.

INT: Does it bother you now that it is there?

NAR: No.

INT: Do you know about how far away that TMI is from us, the plant?

NAR: Well, they tell us it's twenty two miles as the crow flies.

INT: You hit it right on the nose.

NAR: I listen to the radio.

INT: It's interesting. Some people, they're like "I think it's fifty miles."

NAR: Oh, really? With all that conversation?

INT: Not too many, but they seem to get it from so many sources.

NAR: Hmm.

INT: Okay, what did you think about when you first heard about it? Do you remember were you worried or?

NAR: I don't know that I gave it any thought. Just hearing about it. But once we had conversation about it then you start to think of the implications. But immediately no, I don't think I had a reaction right away other than we've got a problem here.

INT: What sort of implications did you think about? After you started thinking about it.

NAR: Well, after we discussed it and we were able to determine the severity of it through, as Pete said, just what Denton had to say. When we could see him, the words coming out of his mouth, not as were interpreted by news people. Then we did make contingency plans as far as, you know, what if. But otherwise everything went on the same. Our children were to go to school and Pete went to work. Nothing was changed.

INT: What were your contingency plans?

NAR: We did go as far as to have both of our vehicles ready to go, full gas tanks. We gathered some important papers that we felt we should have if we would have to leave quickly. And where we would go. We would head west to where Pete's family is, in Oil City. And then of course depending on what time of day or night, if we were to go, that I would leave immediately with our children and he would follow as soon as possible.

INT: And that was because of his, to keep things organized where he works? Right?

NAR: Right. Right. He felt a responsibility there to make sure everything was shut down properly and that the men who worked there were headed in their way, too.

INT: Did that upset you at all, because he might be going separately?

NAR: I was not upset as far as being concerned that I had this responsibility of driving myself to Oil City. I have no problem of driving great distances by myself. And I don't know what I was very upset concerning whether Pete would follow or not because for some reason I had great faith that everything was going to be okay.

INT: Did you have any calls coming in from outside of Carlisle, from relatives or friends?

NAR: Yes, we did. Of course the further you get from Carlisle the more inflated the stories were. I contacted my parents just to assure them that everything was fine and there was no problem and it wasn't nearly as bad as what they may have heard on the media. Pete's parents called us because they were in Florida at the time and they were planning to stop here on their way home and had there been a problem they would not have stopped but gone directly home. So that was really the only call that we had.

INT: Did you seek out further information after you heard the initial news?

NAR: Oh yes. We listened to as many programs on the radio. Both local and Harrisburg and also go as many of the televised programs as possible. We did not get on the

telephone or buy a bunch of newspapers to get all the different slants on it. No, we didn't go that far.

INT: Did you rely mostly on local information or, like local stations, or did you listen to the national as well?

NAR: Well, as far as the television news it was mostly the national stations. Although we did seek a Harrisburg station. I guess it was WHP and in the morning we listened to the Harrisburg station. Through the day we listened to the local station. As I said the word that we relied on the most was those from Mr. Denton.

INT: Mhm... And why was that?

NAR: Well, we thought that we would get the most honest appraisal of the situation from him. That the possibly the utilities might play it down, their PR people in order to keep themselves, keep their noses clean. And also the other end. We felt that the newspaper people were after a story and chose the particular things that would be the most press worthy.

INT: Did your attitude change as the incident progressed?

NAR: For instance?

INT: You started out interested in what was going on and somewhat concerned. Did you become more concerned as things went on, as the days went by?

NAR: I don't know as I would call it more concerned. I certainly was very interested in listening to the progress on how they were doing, decreasing the size of this bubble, et cetera. But as I said, life went on in our house just as we normally would. We didn't change any plans. We didn't change any of our social plans. The only things that were changed were what might have been changed through the schools, since sporting events were cancelled or what have you. We didn't make any changes.

INT: What concerned you the most?

NAR: I was concerned for my children, primarily. Because you hear of these terrible stories that radiation can cause genetic damage and I myself do not feel I am going to have any more family but certainly I would think my children would and I would not want them to have this problem. And then after that my thought was of cancer. For myself and my family. But genetic damage was the first concern.

INT: Did you think that you or your children's health may have been affected?

NAR: No, I don't feel that, no.

INT: Alright, do you think you may be affected in the future by it? If it is not immediate effects that show up now, did you think it may show up later on?

NAR: No, I feel that, I feel very much assured that their projection as far as how far reaching the effects were at the time, that we were well outside of the limits of. So I feel that we are completely safe from any effects now or long range.

INT: Did you have any concern about drinking the milk or eating the food from the area?

NAR: No.

INT: How did you feel about the government officials? You mentioned that you trusted Denton. What did you feel about the national government, or state government, or local government? How they handled the situation.

NAR: Locally in the Carlisle community, I guess the only reaction that our government had, or call to action that they had was to be told that we were an evacuation spot, which is fine. The state government I guess had to order contingency plans for evacuations and care of evacuees. And this is just something that had to be done and I think called upon and in short order they did a, from that I could see they did a good job. Nationally I, I think that Mr. Denton being on the scene and then of course I found it somewhat reassuring, this may be corny, that President Carter came and toured the area. Certainly they would not allow him in or anybody of such national repute if there was any chance of danger. So I felt that was very reassuring to me. As I said that may sound corny but I was reassured by that.

INT: Quite a few people have mentioned that, so you're not alone in it. Because they certainly would not let him in if they had a fear it was going to blow up in a couple of minutes of something.

NAR: Yeah, or damaging him or something he would bring home to his family, whatever. Yeah.

INT: How did you feel about Metropolitan Edison?

NAR: I really felt sorry for them because they went out on a limb, made a huge financial expenditure. You know, let's face it. Business had to gamble, in order to progress they have to gamble. And I know that went far but something happened that, I felt sorry for them. I don't think it was something that they wanted to happen. I don't know, I have mixed feelings now on them now trying to recoup their losses, but not being a Met Ed customer I don't have as strong of feelings as maybe a Met Ed customer.

INT: You are referring now to the raising of the rates?

NAR: Yes. But at the time I felt bad for them because they were really backed in a corner. But then, and people would scream if for all of a sudden they wanted a lot of power and it was not there. So...

INT: How did you feel about Metropolitan Edison as a source of information? During the incident.

NAR: Oh, as a source of information. As a said, I relied most heavily on Denton. I think probably they might have had a tendency to play down things and play up the positive side. Which was part of public relations.

INT: Did you feel that they were in control of the situation down at Three Mile Island?

NAR: I was hoping they were. I felt that they certainly pulled out all the stops as far as getting knowledgeable people in there and I just hope that they were on top of it.

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

NAR: Again I'd like to feel that they are. I just don't know if I really have a definite opinion on it. Right now its not doing anything, is it? It is just there, being thoroughly investigated and repaired, etc. I would imagine that everything was in order.

INT: Well I know just recently I picked up a paper and it said something about there had been another, they had leaked some radioactive water into the Susquehanna. That's about the only thing I have really heard in awhile.

NAR: That's... To tell you the truth I have not really followed a whole lot more of this. I just feel that right now it is a big hay day for the pros and cons and everybody is going to jump on every little thing so that it's really just opinion at this point, anything that you would read. Maybe that is not the right attitude but that's kind of how I feel.

INT: If the worst had occurred what do you think might have happened?

NAR: In our home in conversation we carried as far as the possibility that we would have to leave and probably could not come back and we came up with the figure twenty years. Until the area would be decontaminated. So this would presuppose we were thinking in terms of meltdown. But that's as far as we carried the what ifs.

INT: Do you know why you came up with the figure of twenty years? Why that stood out?

NAR: I don't know. That's probably what came through in some news, through the media somehow or another.

INT: Did you have any mental image in your mind of what a meltdown might be? What it would look like?

NAR: I think the only thing that I, reflecting back. Was just starkness. The buildings would remain but the vegetation would be gone. And then of course you try to picture what things would look like, you know I was trying to envision what my home would look like if I came back to it in twenty years and it wasn't very pretty. Basically the buildings and no vegetation I think was what I came up with. I didn't think of the waters as being any particular color or certainly there would be absence of any animal life, too. That's what I pictured.

INT: Did you have any images in your mind about what was going on at Three Mile Island during the affair?

NAR: I don't think so because I really don't have a, any knowledge of what all this involves with a reactor other than a quick glimpse of it in high school physics, but that was a while ago. So I really didn't have any knowledge to draw on to create an image.

INT: Okay... Did you think about your own death at all?

NAR: The only way I thought of death is if and when the exposure might cause cancer. That's the only relationship. That's all. Because I have seen people die of cancer, I don't want to go that way. That was basically. And just myself. I was not thinking in terms of my family. I guess maybe I thought they were above it or something, I don't know, but that was the only thought that I gave. And it was not a lot of thought.

INT: So you didn't think at all about surviving the immediate situation at Three Mile Island. That you wouldn't say last the week out of something like that?

NAR: Oh no no no. It was only long range.

INT: Did you feel you had special responsibilities during the incident, you mentioned to your children?

NAR: Basically to my children, to be sure that they would not be exposed or to the best of my knowledge, and ability that they not be exposed. The only other responsibility that I felt was to keep our families informed of our well being. They were concerned. I did not carry that concern as far as to contact my brothers, just my parents and Pete's parents, that's all. My biggest concern was to get our children out of here safely.

INT: How did your children react to the incident?

NAR: I think they were very matter of fact about it, and I don't know if this is their reaction or because we were calm about it, you know, they were reacting in the same line as we were. Of course they would come home from school with lots of very interesting stories, as said to you they were disgruntled about not having recess. They had to stay inside.

INT: How did you feel about that? Did you keep them inside when they were home?

NAR: No, I didn't. I felt that the only thing that stops radiation is lead, right? So since the school is not made of lead and my house is not made out of it, they say well there is less chance, but I don't know. What are we talking about less? Less that what? No I didn't confine them. I was sorry they missed their recess but I can see the school's position in why they had to do it.

INT: Did you remember any of the little stories, you said they'd come home with tales to tell, do you remember anything? Or the types of things that they were?

NAR: I don't know if there were any, I'm sure there were some, I can't recall off-hand as I said only the grumbling about the recess.

INT: I don't blame them. It's always a pain to have to sit inside.

NAR: Oh you bet. Of course, Scott doesn't have recess. He was in 9th grade last year. But Alice was in 6th grade and they have it.

INT: Did you have things to do which you otherwise would not have done. For instance, you mentioned you kept your cars ready to go, but did you stay basically at your same routine?

NAR: Oh yes.

INT: So you didn't add anything to your basic routine at all?

NAR: The only thing, as I said, was to be sure that I had what papers I felt I should have with me. And I went so far as to put them in all in a bag, not a suitcase, it was just a bag, they would be together and I could get a hold of them I wouldn't have to run through drawers and closets to collect them. That's really all. And the tanks full and I knew in my mind how I would travel to Oil City, which route I would take which is the route we always take.

INT: Did you have any ideas about how it would be best to act in such a situation? I mentioned to your husband like moral or ethical ideas, like trying to be very calm in the situation. I know another mother I interviewed felt that you couldn't over react to the situation, that was her reaction.

NAR: Well this is how I felt. I would not leave until one of two things, we were ordered to evacuate, which for some reason or other I didn't feel would come, since Carlisle was an evacuation point, and the only other thing was that if in conversation and in news I felt that whatever was coming in our direction. If we had a strong southeasterly wind that was going to blow it to Carlisle that I might have reconsidered. But my plans were not to leave until we were ordered to do so. Moral and ethical. To be orderly, to be calm and I think my prime concern was just to the four of us, not for, I didn't think "Gee maybe

there shouldn't be both of our cars on the road, because we would be taking space from somebody else on the road." I didn't think of that, I know I spoke to a neighbor and I said "Well why wouldn't you take your trailer with you because then you could just stop wherever" and she said "Because that would take up room for someone else on the road." And I thought "WOW! That's more than I would have thought of, but this is a very Christian person." So...

INT: Did you have conversations with neighbors and friends? What sorts of things seemed to be running through peoples minds?

NAR: Most of the people I spoke with had reactions similar to ours in that, we would be ready to go, we all knew where we were going if we had to go, we all had families north or west of here so that we could head in that direction. Being the ages we are, we don't have any friends who are pregnant who might have been concerned about staying around. Or we do have one friend who had a pre-schooler, yes she sent both of her boys home to her mother, and one boy is ten and one is two. She sent her kids home. Sometimes she reacts a little more than we do. She may come out on top of the pile someday when we don't, sometimes too I think in cases like that, grandparents bring pressure to bear too. We did not have that.

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

NAR: Well, I guess we were here when Agnes hit in June of '72 and I know how devastating that was, not that there could be any similarity but that was a disaster and one that I was very aware of. We did not have a problem right here at our house but certainly the rest of Carlisle did. And that really is the only disaster that I feel that I lived through. You know, I was too young to know World War II, and still too young to know the Korean War and the Vietnamese War I just didn't relate to I guess. I don't know.

INT: You know, what we are finding is that there is a just a certain like age group where there seems to be a pattern. If you lived through a disaster, I forget what they said it was-- I think it extends up to early 20's, I'm not sure-- and people refer back to that. And if they don't have something there, then they draw a blank. If nothing happened. But otherwise they tend to go back to that. When you get beyond a certain point you refer less and less to disasters.

NAR: Huh. How about that.

INT: So it's sort of almost like there's a, I don't know, like a period when you are almost programmed or something.

NAR: Well, let's face it. Here in the United States, in certain age-groups, my parents and Pete's parents of course, they lived through WW2 which was quite an experience and they sent their fathers and their brothers and their sons and their dear friends off. I was born after the war started so I certainly was not aware of what was going on. My brother did go to Vietnam and there were times when he was in danger, but then again I have this

underlying faith that every thing is going to be okay, I don't know why but I just do, these things happen to other people. Not to me. Which someday I know I'll have a rude awakening.

INT: I think that's true of most people. It's a good way to get through a crisis, it sort of keeps you on a clear level of thinking. That's how I react to it.

NAR: I pray very hard too.

INT: Did you think about God a lot during the incident?

NAR: As Pete said, we certainly made specific mention of it in our prayers, probably more so than any other incident ever. Rather than, you know, if someone was sick we would certainly mention "Please heal..." whoever. We do pray daily and try to remember specific things to pray for, that of course was one of the specifics.

INT: Did you have any Biblical images come to your mind during it?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you feel that God intervened at all during the incident, in a special way out of the ordinary?

NAR: The only thing I would think, and of course this was something that we specifically prayed for too was to "Please guide the technicians and whoever involved to right this situation." And... I feel that certainly His hand was in that, giving these people the knowledge and the ability to handle this situation. I feel that this is where it all comes from.

INT: Now, your husband mentioned that TMI was brought up in the prayers at your church service. Did you attend that service as well?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did the prayers make you feel any better, because they were mentioned in church?

NAR: I believe very strongly in the power of prayer and the more people praying for something, the more power. And I think maybe when you have a church full of people praying for something that's a big loud voice to be heard.

INT: Does your faith say anything about the rightness or wrongness of nuclear power?

NAR: Not that I'm aware of.

INT: How do you feel about the church taking a pro or con stance on nuclear power?

NAR: Well I can look at that from two angles. I feel our church as a lot of work to do within and I would be very happy to see energy spent in that direction. Then I don't know if the Catholic Church coming out for or against nuclear power would have any bearing on the government handling of it or the individual Catholic's handling of it or the individual Americans. Because I feel that everybody has their own thoughts and feelings. Yes, there are certain groups that are swayed by "The Catholic church says" or "The Protestant church says" but I like to feel that I would use my own mind and come to my own conclusions. Can you see? I can put a light on here.

INT: There's not all that much more. Okay... Did you think of any TV shows or movies?

NAR: No, but many people brought up The China Syndrome thing to us which we have seen since, the similarity et cetera in the fact they said "an area the size of Pennsylvania." (chuckles) This was mentioned to us many times in conversation but as far as myself thinking, no.

INT: Did you think of any books?

NAR: No.

INT: Did any songs pass through your mind?

NAR: The only thing, for some reason or other, was there a play on Broadway "A Man on the Moon Marigolds" or something like that? Wasn't that about radiation?

INT: I'm not sure.

NAR: It has a sub-title concerning radiation. That would be about the only thing I think...

INT: Had you seen the play or just had heard about it?

NAR: Nope. Just had heard of it, yeah.

INT: Did you think of any historical events?

NAR: I don't know if these would have been thought of on my own or prompted by the media but of course Hiroshima and Nagasaki were mentioned certainly and the affects of the radiation. But as I said, I don't believe these were thoughts that I came upon myself, they were inspired by the news media.

INT: Did you have any daydreams?

NAR: Concerning the disaster or...?

INT: Concerning the incident or effects of the incident, other than anything you may have mentioned, that passed through your mind like genetic problems?

NAR: The only thing that I think I gave any thought of, I don't know if you'd call it a "daydream," I gave any reactive thought to was leaving, and we would be with Pete's family and if it was an extended stay would we go so far as to purchase a home and look for a job in that area, away from here or, that was probably about as far as I got with my thoughts, but I never came to a conclusion.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams that you remember?

NAR: Not that I was aware of, no.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed at all?

NAR: No. Only by telephone calls that's all. Not concerned calls. From work.

INT: Were they calls concerning the incident?

NAR: No, calls from work. Pete gets calls, this broke that broke and what do we do now.

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

NAR: Yes, the usual string of cornies about glowing in the dark, and what have you, then or course as Pete alluded to the where do you live- 25 miles west of Goldsboro. But that's about all I can think of I'm sure there were more but that was about it.

INT: Did you pass the jokes on, that you heard?

NAR: The one about where we live, yeah, just to those who would be very aware of what's going on.

INT: Did you notice any changes in the people around you during the incident?

NAR: Well I think conversation zeroed right in on the whole thing and what are you going to do if... As I said, basically our friends went about their daily routines like it was not there. Certainly they were very aware and with the exception of just the one friend everybody's family continued activities per normal. As far as change, not really just that this was the topic of conversation.

INT: Do you think it had any lasting affects on people? Or on yourself?

NAR: The only effects that it may have had on me it makes you very aware of what's important, it's not the material things. Its' your health and the ones you love. When I was thinking of what I would have to take with me. If I had to go quickly. I didn't think about my furniture or whatever, I thought gee I have to get basic clothing and something

that's going to take us into a couple seasons. And this was my concern. The material things get set aside.

INT: Do you have any opinions on nuclear energy?

NAR: I feel that the American people, myself included, are very piggish with our use of energy of any kind, we're used to our cars, we're used to our houses being warm, our dishwashers and our washer machines, our refrigerators and our color televisions. And even though many of us make conscious efforts to conserve by riding bikes, keeping our thermostats down, opening the dishwasher so it doesn't go through the dry cycle, hanging clothes on the line. That there are still certain things that we do not want to give up and if we're going to continue like this and we don't want to give them up, we are going to have to look for alternate sources. Nuclear power is a very real thing. I also feel that in order to investigate alternate sources the environmentalists are going to have to ease up a little bit, they are just, some of these things are just going to have to be set aside, or we are going to have to sacrifice the cars, the warm houses, the appliances, et cetera. Nuclear power does not worry me, I'm in favor of it, a petition came around today saying are you for or against, I would be for. I'm very anxious for the technicians, the manufacturers of the equipment and the users to become better educated. And me as just a, somebody who consumes this power. There has to be an education and unfortunately at this point I think nuclear power has a lot of PR work to do after this thing. A lot of people are frightened, but not frightened enough to cut back on their use.

INT: Somehow they seem to disassociate themselves between that and what they do.

NAR: Well because we get ours from electric company and they burn coal. Our electric company doesn't use nuclear power, but someday it's going to come to that, more and more. I am somewhat concerned, how are we going to dispose of the wastes. Are we running to the end of the tape?

INT: No, I just thought to stop. One of my pet peeves.

NAR: I think we really have to investigate the disposal of the wastes. And I think that's one of the areas that people are most sensitive about, the disposal of the wastes. Where are you going about this water and these solid wastes, I don't want them buried in my county. I don't know that's one of the big concerns.

INT: Is there anything you'd like to add?

NAR: (coughs) Could you please repeat the question again?

INT: Oh, is there anything you'd like to add to this?

NAR: I'm adding this for my husband. He very much objected to our local newspaper's coverage and photographs of Three Mile Island. Instead of using the usual black and

white they used red and black which he felt had a special effect on people seeing things in red means danger right away, and he really resented this.