

October 1, 1979

Occupation: Hospital secretary

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

NARRATOR: The day it happened. I heard it on the radio.

INT: Do you remember what day that was?

NAR: Friday. I was out shopping. Well, I had stopped at the Burger King to get something to eat and I sat in the car to eat and I was listening to the radio.

INT: Do you remember what the station was?

NAR: It was one of the Carlisle stations. It was probably Y96 because I listen to that more than the others.

INT: Did you talk about this with friends, family, and co-workers?

NAR: Yeah. I worked that weekend at the hospital and, well, I guess Harrisburg was planning, you know, about evacuating their patients and they were evacuating their patients to our hospital. That's when I really got upset. I was pretty calm until I went to work. We had to make these transfer sheets up for all the patients in our hospital and that really got me shook up. Obviously they knew more about it than I did. Like the administrators or whatever at the hospital had met with police and fire...and making arrangements so that really scared me. Then most of my friends left town like on Friday. I had one friend that flew to Iowa. Her husband called and made reservations for her to fly back with their two children without even, you know, asking. I think there was one friend of mine that didn't leave town. Everybody else I knew had left.

INT: That's pretty scary.

NAR: Yeah. My in-laws left. My parents didn't leave. They were worried but they didn't...

INT: What were you talking about...were you talking about leaving?

NAR: Yes, I guess it was mostly about leaving. We weren't too concerned... I mean, we didn't feel like it should have, that this shouldn't even be happening. We were concerned about getting away. And also I didn't really understand what was happening if a melt-down did occur. I thought, you know, it might explode and we would all be wiped out. I didn't understand.

INT: Did your attitude change, did you feel it was a serious situation after that first initial...?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you feel it was a crisis?

NAR: Yeah, like I said when I went to the hospital and saw them making all these plans to get rid of the patients, that really... that really freaked me out. I know my husband was gone. He drives a truck and he was out of town. And I was really upset.

INT: I understand. How did you feel about other's reactions to the incident? Did they overreact or didn't react enough, or...?

NAR: In the beginning, like when on Friday when my girlfriend left for Iowa, you know the same night, I thought she was overreacting. I thought it was kinda silly. She said about these other friends of ours that were leaving and I thought "Umm..." But Saturday night I went to work and I really thought maybe they weren't so silly.

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

NAR: Yeah. I think probably because it, you know, affected our lives.

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

NAR: Well, I think they did the best they could. They seemed to try and keep us informed. I don't really think it was their fault that things were so confused. I think they did the best job they could.

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

NAR: Well I don't think...I think they did the best that they could. I don't think that they were prepared for...they had never experienced anything like this before and I'm sure that they were unsure of themselves and they didn't want to panic, you know.

INT: How did you feel about Met Ed? At this time?

NAR: Before this happened?

INT: Well, no, before all the news media reported...at the time?

NAR: Well, it really upset me that, you know, they would allow something like this to happen. I just think that, you know, they could have found some other way to provide us with electricity than something that could possibly danger, put so many people's lives in danger.

INT: Was there anyone who you found particularly reliable, that you trusted more than others?

NAR: The media, I guess. Well, I don't know. You don't really know who to believe. You just... I guess I really didn't trust anybody. That's why I panicked. Because I think if I would have trusted, you know, what they were saying I would have stayed. But I guess I really didn't know who to believe so I thought the safest place, the safest thing would be to get as far away as I could.

INT: Was there anyone who you particularly mistrusted?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: In control... I don't know. When something like that goes wrong I don't see how you can... I'm sure they did what they could but... there's not too much known about the situation and... I think they did as much as they could. There is only so much a person can do and the rest is...

INT: Do you feel now that those in charge were in control?

NAR: I don't know that much about it and I'm sure they probably did all they could but... I don't know if they could have planned to handle it any better. I really don't know.

INT: How about now, do you think they are in control?

NAR: I'd like to think they are. I hope they are.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: Yeah. Like I said my husband was gone. I didn't really understand a lot of this. Like I said before, I thought that if a meltdown occurred, this was the end. We'd all be wiped out. I really didn't understand what they said. Maybe if he would have been home he could have explained to me or calmed me. I was really worried for the kids.

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

NAR: Yeah, and we certainly wouldn't have taken a trip back to Ohio.

INT: What were your feelings about leaving the area?

NAR: I couldn't wait to get away. The only thing that concerned me was... panic on the highways. I thought I'd get on the turnpike and there's going to be a million cars and we'll never get away fast. Where I'm from it's like 8 hours away from here and I'd never

driven more than 2 hours at a time and I'd just worked the weekend and I was tired. I'd never driven back home by myself.

INT: So you did leave during the incident?

NAR: Uh huh.

INT: How long did you stay?

NAR: We were gone four days.

INT: What brought you to finally leave?

NAR: Well, we talked about it at work and my husband, my husband had just started that map and couldn't leave and he said that if I was that upset about it that it was up to me. It was my decision. We talked about it at work a lot. Most of the nurses at the hospital said that if they didn't have a job to tie them down that they would leave and everybody seemed to think it was a pretty good idea to go. I needed a vacation.

INT: What did you want to take with you?

NAR: Our kids of course. And my brother... I have a brother who is still living at home. I guess he's in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. I wanted my parents to go, but they didn't. They were too old. (short chuckle) They're not too old, but that's what they said. I thought about taking silly stuff like baby pictures because I thought the thing is going to meltdown while we are gone and the house will be in ashes and stuff. But I don't think I took any pictures. I was just anxious to leave.

INT: What did you take with you?

NAR: Just clothing, just enough to last for a week or so.

INT: Was there someone in your life who you were watching in order to help you make the decision?

NAR: No, I had gone to church on Sunday and the minister's sermon was sort about this panicking and stuff. I guess he'd had a lot of calls and I thought it would be interesting to hear what he had to say. He said that when our time comes, our time comes. Not to panic and put our trust and that sort of calmed me. And I thought well, if he's not too upset about this, there's no reason why I should be. And then I went to work on Sunday and it was completely worse than Saturday and I thought, I'm getting out. I did have some friends who didn't leave. I just felt like it was my decision, you know. I was concerned about the kids and I was just going to do what I thought was best.

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

NAR: I was sure everybody was upset and panicking and scared and running around like chickens with their heads cut off. I didn't really...I'd never seen the place. They only thing...I felt really sorry for that Harold Denton. I was pretty sure that he was kinda tired and under a lot of pressure.

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

NAR: I don't know. I've heard a lot about the psychological effects on people and I guess some of the kids who were really close. I guess there is really no way of telling if it was affected us physically. I don't think it's affected me any way that I can tell.

INT: How about in the future?

NAR: It could. I'd like to think that it wouldn't, but I just have my doubts.

INT: What other aspects of your life might have been affected?

NAR: Well, financially it wasn't a good thing to happen. Like I didn't miss any work or anything. My husband didn't. It costs to take a trip like that. Other than that I can't think of any way it has affected me.

INT: What about your community, do you think it was affected?

NAR: Yeah, I think it has made us more aware, yeah, of what is going on and I think it has motivated people to speak out and say that we don't want this or, you know, say that we do want this.

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

NAR: I thought that the whole state would be totally destroyed but that's just because I'm...I pictured something like would happen like over in Japan. That's what I thought was going to happen. Obviously, I wasn't very well informed.

INT: How do you suppose it would have affected your health if it would have happened?

NAR: Well, I pictured us all being dead or (chuckles) completely bald. I just expected the worst. I expected that everything within a couple hundred miles would be just leveled.

INT: Did you think houses would burn?

NAR: Yeah, I thought everything would explode and I had these terrible pictures of me and the kids lying under pieces of wood and furniture. Because I had heard stories about what had happened over in Japan and I could picture all kinds of terrible things. And I

thought my husband would be somewhere else in the country and he'd be fine and here we'd be.

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

NAR: I didn't too much think about it at the time but then afterwards... but we bought a quarter of a beef so I wasn't so concerned about that but the milk because we drink a lot of milk. We get our milk at Allen Dairy and the cows are right there and I didn't really think that the radiation came that far but who knows. You know, it might have.

INT: Did you picture in your mind any effects of radiation on life around you? The vegetation, or...?

NAR: I really didn't know what it would do to it.

INT: Did you think of your own death?

NAR: My own death?

INT: Mm-hm.

NAR: I think I was more concerned about my kids and then I was concerned about myself. I didn't sleep too well that weekend. I thought about that a lot.

INT: Did you think you would survive?

NAR: I thought if I could get away from here I would. I was sure if I stayed here I wouldn't. When I left I was sure I'd never see my parents again. It was really spooky. But then I think I tend to over dramatize things a lot. I know a lot of people were scared.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: Yes.

INT: What did you pray for?

NAR: I prayed that we'd all come out of this alive. I prayed that my kids' kids would be alright. That really concerned me that my kids would be alright and they would be able to have children and their children would be all right.

INT: How did God figure in all of this?

NAR: I don't know. Maybe it could have, maybe it could have been a lot worse, but we really don't know how bad it was.

INT: Did any biblical stories or events cross your mind?

NAR: Well, whenever I have problems I just think that our master once said that God will never give us more than we handle and that just kept going through my mind. So I thought whatever happens, you know, we can handle it. That would help me a lot.

INT: Did the idea of Satan or the Last Judgment or the end of the world enter your thinking?

NAR: No. Uh-uh.

INT: Did you or do you now consider the incident as God's disciplining or instructing man on the use of nuclear power? Or just in general?

NAR: No.

INT: So you attended a religious service?

NAR: Mmhm.

INT: And the minister spoke of TMI?

NAR: Mmhm.

INT: What did he say about it?

NAR: He... It's kinda hard to remember but he said that we should trust in the government officials and we should put our trust in them and to God and that God would guide them. I don't know if he said this or I just...it just popped in my head...but I got the impression that if God wanted to get us, he was going to get us. There was nothing we can do about it.

INT: Were there fewer or the same number of people there as usual?

NAR: There was the same number because the church I go to is a small church and there are a lot of farmers and of course, they couldn't leave. I thought there wouldn't be anybody there, but there was the same number.

INT: Did the attendance at the service change your mind?

NAR: It did... sorta. Like I said before I went to work Sunday after church and I got panicky there and, you know, everything just went out the window.

INT: What does your own faith say about the rightness or wrongness of man using and controlling nuclear power?

NAR: That's a tough one. I don't know. I guess I sort felt that it wasn't right. That whose ever idea this was for nuclear power and TMI was kinda playing God because they didn't...I don't really think they can predict what is going to happen or give us a guarantee that it's definitely going to be safe. I just kinda think that they are playing God. I don't think it's right.

INT: Do you think religious persons or institutions should take any public stand? Either for or against?

NAR: Yeah. I think they should. I haven't personally done too much about it. For a while that's all you heard about and that's all anybody talked about and I just got so sick of hearing about it. The only contribution I made was the Mother's group that I baby-sit for. I babysat for them one day while they wrote letters to the representatives and stuff but other than this interview I haven't done anything. I feel strongly against it but I haven't done anything to voice my opinion. I feel kinda guilty about that.

INT: What position do you think religious persons or institutions should take?

NAR: My opinion is that they should speak out against it. But... I don't know how the church feels about it.

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

NAR: Yeah, I felt very responsible for my kids and I thought, you know, I got to get them away from here. I think that's why I left. I don't think so much that I panicked. I did sort of panic, but I felt really responsible to my kids and their kids. I thought I had to get them away at least until at least they say it is okay. I guess that's about it.

INT: Was your job or work affected by TMI?

NAR: How do you mean that?

INT: Well you say you had these transfer things, was there anything else that was disruptive or that you had to deal with because of TMI? Were there more people absent from work?

NAR: No. There wasn't a lot of people absent. The transfer sheets were mostly done when I got there. They had done them on like Friday and Saturday morning. It didn't really affect my job in any way.

INT: You didn't have anything to do that you otherwise wouldn't have had to do?



NAR: No, the girls that worked the shifts before me would have done that. They had gotten them all done by the time I got there. I didn't work until Saturday evening so they had all that done say like from Friday to Saturday afternoon. It made more work for them. And then it was all for nothing anyway because we didn't get rid of any patients and Harrisburg didn't get rid of any of their patients so it was a waste.

INT: How did this affect you and those around you?

NAR: Like I said before the trip back home cost us. My husband hadn't worked for a couple months and he started, I guess had been at Maslands for about two weeks so we really didn't have a lot of money. We were living off our savings and we really didn't have the money to take the trip. I know some friends of mine didn't have the money to fly back home or take a weekend vacation and it made me really nervous and uptight. I guess that's about it.

INT: Did you have any ideas of how it would be best to behave in such a situation? Like personal or ethical or moral?

NAR: Well, I thought everybody should leave. I didn't think anybody should panic but I was sure that, you know, the highways would be crowded and people would be having accidents.

INT: Did you try to behave this way?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Was there anything that made it difficult?

NAR: No, I was counting, I was counting on everybody panicking and I was glad that they didn't.

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

NAR: The bombings in Japan. I thought about that a lot. And I guess I thought about that flood we had when we first moved here. I guess that was in '72. Agnes, I think. I thought about that because I know people panicked and got sick and hurt. I thought well gee, this is ten times worse.

INT: Did anything like this ever happen to you before?

NAR: Well, this is silly. Once we went camping. It was the first time we ever went camping and we were caught in a flash flood and we were cut off from the campground that we were staying at and we didn't have any food and we were stuck there a couple of days. That happened when I was a kid and that scared me.

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

NAR: ...I guess both of those floods.

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

NAR: More frightening... Because I thought this flood, those floods I was sure that it would eventually stop raining and we could handle that, but this TMI thing, I just thought we were all going to be killed. My husband was gone and I thought he's off someplace else in the country and he's going to make it and the kids and I are going to be dead.

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

NAR: My brother had seen the China Syndrome. And at the time it came out I thought no big deal- that's nothing that I'd be interested in. Now after it happened I thought, gee, why didn't I go see that.

INT: Did any books or stories come to mind?

NAR: Yeah. Stuff I'd read about those bombings.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs or changing lyrics to old tunes or anything?

NAR: No. Did anybody answer yes to that question?

INT: Yeah, some people I guess. But no, I haven't run into that.

NAR: No, that's one thing that never entered my mind. (both chuckle)

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

NAR: Yeah, I had daydreams about us lying under the house dead you know. My kids are very very important to me and my husband is and I just had these terrible thoughts that I'd be lying under something and they would be somewhere out of my reach crying mommy, mommy and that just...I can't handle them being hurt and then I just...

INT: Have you had any since?

NAR: No, not anymore.

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

NAR: I don't think so.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed in any way?

NAR: Yeah, I had problems sleeping.

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

NAR: What kind of things?

INT: Were people closer, or were they more distant, or...?

NAR: No. I don't know. I don't think I'm closer to any of my friends or family. We have always been as close as we are now. I don't think... at the time I guess I was really concerned about my parents staying here. My brother. Both of my brothers. My one brother wasn't married at the time and I was worried about him and my future sister-in-law. I guess at the time it did sort of bring us...not closer...but more concerned for their welfare. Of course I always am concerned but...

INT: But more for each other.

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did the incident change you in any lasting way?

NAR: Well now I'm not afraid to take a trip like that. (chuckles) I know that I can...it's difficult getting home because you have to go around several big cities and my mother has, you know, driven back and forth hundreds of times and she always gets lost. And I never pay any attention when we go anywhere. My husband is a truck driver and of course he has to know where he's going and it's a big difference between me and him. I get lost around town so it gave me more confidence in myself that I could take a trip and find directions, you know. It made me feel more mature that my kids can depend on me. And my brother. I took my 15 year old brother with me and it made me feel very mature that people were depending on me.

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

NAR: Did I hear any jokes?

INT: Mmhm.

NAR: No, I don't think there was anything to joke about. Even when I was back home in Ohio, nobody joked about it. They were really concerned. All my relatives called right away when they heard about it on the radio or TV, whatever, and said of course to come home. There just wasn't anything to joke about. Even now I don't think I've heard any jokes. It's too serious.

INT: Did you see any posters or graffiti around?

NAR: No. Was there any? Am I missing out on something?

INT: At least on Dickinson Campus and other people I've interviewed in the Carlisle, there was a lot of graffiti going on.

NAR: Really?

INT: Bald jokes and baby jokes. They got pretty crude. I stayed on Dickinson until Monday myself and heard a whole line of them and I didn't think they were funny either. I think it was kind of a release of tension. You know, just kind of, "I'd rather not get worried; I'd rather laugh about it."

NAR: Something I didn't appreciate was the "I Survived TMI" shirts. Anything to make a buck. I just thought that was ridiculous. That was... Some people could have really gotten hurt.

INT: Have you developed an opinion about nuclear power?

NAR: I don't think it is any good. I think... They say, I've heard that they don't want to discover or explore any other methods like coal or water and stuff, you know, because it wouldn't provide us with the same amount... we are still going to come up short if we try anything else. I am very energy conscious. My husband... it is a big joke with us. He says I'm so tight. I run around shutting lights off, you know, and no TV and I do the dishwasher after 8 and the laundry after 8 because they say that helps. I only have one light on most of the time when nobody's here. I just feel that if everybody would be really concerned about it and really tried, they could handle having less electricity. I just think they should do away with the nuclear and find, use coal or water or wood or something...anything else. I just think we have it too easy. We take too much for granted. I'd be happy without a TV. We didn't have a TV for a couple of months and it was really weird having one again, you know. I can make sacrifices. I think we should make sacrifices. I think I could sacrifice my TV or dishwasher or something rather than sacrifice my children's health or their children or whatever. I'd be willing to make the sacrifice and I'm sure a lot of other people would be too.