

Date: 1979

Occupation: Newspaper Circulation Director

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

NARRATOR: March 28th. I think that was the day that it really came to a head. I heard a day before that.

INT: Was that Wednesday or Friday?

NAR: Friday is when it really became a serious problem. Wednesday, I think was the 28th?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Okay, that's when I first heard about it at a staff meeting with Editorial, when our managing editor at that time was Neil Hopp and he expressed his views and informed me that we might be selling a few more papers than normal because of the incident so we took care of it from there.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: How far is TMI?

NAR: We're about 21 miles from it. That's a straight line. If you go by traveling routes and everything else, then it might be 24 or 25 miles away.

INT: What did you think about the crisis at that point?

NAR: Well, I tell you, my wife was about 8 ½ months pregnant at the time so I was very concerned about it. The Friday that our paper came out with the information that it could be a serious matter, at that time we were planning a trip to Ithaca, NY so of course we did go through and drive up there. I left my wife and dog up there for the whole remaining week, the following week.

INT: So you did feel that it was a very serious situation?

NAR: Oh yes. Mmhm.

INT: Did you seek out further information?

NAR: Oh yeah, I was in close contact with the managing editor and the whole editorial staff as information came in. I definitely sat down and talked with them about it.

INT: And you talked with friends and co-workers?

NAR: Mmhm.

INT: About what?

NAR: Well, I talked to several neighbors of mine about it. What their reaction was and what they were going to do. Most of them just sat it out. They remained in the area and was content with that until something really serious was announced.

INT: Did your attitude change at all?

NAR: Attitude about the area or attitude about--

INT: About the crisis.

NAR: Oh yeah, as of Monday when I came back from New York, I left my wife and dog up there and I--

INT: And you stayed for the weekend?

NAR: Yeah, I stayed for the weekend and came back Monday. I felt I should be here in case any problems would arise and, oh yeah, I was very concerned about it as of Monday.

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

NAR: Well, everybody had pretty much the same mood but I think the general public handled it well, but I think there were a lot of misinformants. We weren't really informed as to what the real situation was. Everybody had mixed emotions as to how to react, but basically we all were pretty cool about it, and just kind of went, you know, hour by hour listening as to what the developments were at that time.

INT: Was there like any degree of tension around here? Like a lot more tension than usual?

NAR: Oh yeah, yeah, a lot more than normal. There was day-to-day job pressures but they do not compare with what people were feeling about TMI.

INT: Did you follow like other newspapers and radio and TV?

NAR: Yes, I used to pick up the morning Patriot. Every morning I'd read about what's going on.

INT: That's the Harrisburg paper?

NAR: Yes, that's the Harrisburg paper. And I also listened. We kept a radio on in here just to hear what was going on. Any new developments as they came in. But I was most informed by our editorial staff, they pretty much knew what was going on. They had reporters down there so I got a first hand story from them, rather than listening to the radio or watching television or reading the newspaper.

INT: Were they down there like right close to it?

NAR: Well, I'm sure they were but they realized it was part of their jobs and somebody had to report on it so they were willing to go down and check it out.

INT: How did you feel about the way the media handled the situation?

NAR: The media, locally, handled it pretty well. I feel very proud to be part of this paper knowing that they were printing as many facts as they could possibly find and I think they handled it extremely well. Some radios and TV networks from all over the country were reporting on things that just weren't true. So there was a lot of blowing out of proportion as to how serious the crisis really was. But then it boils down to the fact that--

INT: You think they were making it worse than it really was?

NAR: I feel they were. Especially in New York. When I was in New York for the weekend and they were really saying some pretty far-out things about really what was going on and I didn't believe it at the time and I still don't believe half of the things they said.

INT: People in Europe heard that Pennsylvania itself was blowing up.

NAR: Yeah, you hear the usual story of people saying that well, 300 people killed and the reactor exploded and all this crap which really wasn't true, but unfortunately that's how rumors get started. They get blown out of proportion by networks and radio stations and newspapers as well. I picked up the local paper in Ithaca when I was there for the weekend and they had quite a few stories on it and I would read through some of them and I knew, I felt I knew more about it than anybody up there did because of the fact that I'd been involved. It surprises me.

INT: How did you feel that the government handled the situation?

NAR: As well as could be expected I guess is the best way I can answer that. They might have been a little better equipped to alert the public. Especially the local people that lived around Three Mile Island than they did, but I guess they got to worry about panic too. They don't want to panic people into something that, you know, really wasn't as serious as they thought it might have been.

INT: What about Met Ed? Did you think they handled it--

NAR: I thought they handled it very poorly. They would try to seek out information from them and they'd say one thing and then contradict themselves later on. I had no respect for Met Ed nor do I now.

INT: Was there anyone who you found particularly reliable? Anyone whose word you trusted more than others?

NAR: I trusted my own editorial staff more than I trusted anybody else. Because I felt they were doing a job trying to find out what was going on and I think they handled it very well. I don't know. How long have you been in the area?

INT: Well, I...

NAR: Is this your first year at Dickinson?

INT: No, I'm a junior.

NAR: We printed at TMI tab once the whole incident had blown over and it told the whole story very well. An excellent tab.

INT: Was there anyone who you mistrusted particularly?

NAR: Yeah, the networks. But I don't think it was their fault. They get a piece of the story and blow it out of proportion. I kind of learned to listen to the radio and TV with a grain of salt.

INT: In one ear, out the other.

NAR: Believe maybe part of it or a portion of it was true, but the rest of it was really blown up.

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

NAR: Well I thought that... I can't even think of the name of the guy that was in charge of the whole situation down there from the White House, what was his name? I can't even think of it? That's terrible. I can't think of the guy's name.

INT: Denton?

NAR: Denton, yeah. Yeah, I think he handled himself very well. I think he handled the situation very well. Fortunately enough, nobody really panicked. There was more of a panic during this last gas situation than there was for the Three Mile Island. The gas situation, all that amounted to was that nobody would be able to drive, as much as they wanted to, and with TMI, you know, it could have been very disastrous for us. I think he handled the situation very well. I was impressed.

INT: What reassured you that he was in charge?

NAR: Just by the fact that he was there. Not reporting from an office in Washington, D.C. which would do nobody any good at all. He was there at TMI investigating the whole situation and to me, I had a lot of respect for somebody like that. We might feel the effects 10 years from now with the radiation, but...

INT: I'm not really looking forward to that.

NAR: No, I'm not either.

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

NAR: As far as people like Denton? Yes I do. I feel they were in charge of the situation.

INT: Are they in control now?

NAR: I think they've backed off a bit. I'm sure everybody is watching all the nuclear plants throughout the country. The least little mistake that's made everybody knows about it. There was a reporting in Minnesota where something, one of the reactors that had leaked some radiation and everyone was made well aware of it. It was on the news, the radio and in most of the newspapers. I think in a sense it has taught us all a lesson to keep a closer look-out for it. Unfortunately I think as far as the country's well-being it's the only way. That's the only way we are going to survive. If we're going to find alternate routes for energy, and that is. I lived through TMI, I'm here now, and I still feel that nuclear power plants are a must. That's the only way we are going to make it.

INT: You were worried about the situation, what worried you most about it?

NAR: Well, not knowing how much radiation and the fact that I had a pregnant wife at the time. I was very very concerned about her more than I was about myself. I didn't want anything to happen to my newborn child later on in life. So that was the thing that concerned me most. Me being here myself during the week of the tragedy, or what could have been a tragedy, that didn't bother me nearly as much as I felt relieved to know that my wife was in New York and not even in the area.

INT: Did you change your ordinary routines?

NAR: I listened to the radio a lot more. I read the newspapers a lot more thoroughly than I ever had before, but that's about it. Other than that, there was no change in my routine.

INT: You said you left Friday for the weekend, what did you take with you?

NAR: We had planned, as soon as the article broke out in the paper, Friday, I left here about 4:30 in the afternoon and went home, kept my wife inside, and we loaded up the

car and went. We even took an alternate route. We usually take 81 all the way to Ithaca. And 81 got pretty close to TMI so we decided to take 15, 14, and 13 all the way up. We went straight out instead of going around and coming up.

INT: Was there someone you were watching in order to decide what you would do? Like if they would leave, you would leave?

NAR: We had meetings periodically during the day about it and we had a staff meeting discussing how severe the situation was and I kept in very close contact with the publisher, to find out what his views were and how he felt about it. And I think agreed with me that it was a good move to get my wife out of here, until the situation cooled down.

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

NAR: I really didn't even worry about that. Other than you have all these blown up pictures that it melted into the Susquehanna River and it's going to contaminate all the water and everything else like this, but it was just ideas that go into your mind trying to picture what the situation is really all about. Other than that, no.

INT: Do you think it has affected your health at all? What happened?

NAR: No.

INT: Like now or in the future?

NAR: That's hard to say. Now, you know, I feel great, but that doesn't mean 10 years from now I'm not going to, so it's hard to say at this point. Right now I feel fine and I hope to continue to feel fine for another 40-50 years.

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

NAR: I would have left the area. Permanently.

INT: If the worst had occurred within the reactor, what would you say would have happened like to the reactor or to the surrounding area?

NAR: Well, the reactor would have exploded because of the bubble that had been created within the reactor. I definitely would have been very very concerned about it and definitely would have left and I think maybe my attitude... I still don't think my attitude would have changed as to whether or not we need nuclear power or not because we do. There's no way of getting around it. We do need it. Unfortunately it took a bad experience like this to turn lot of people off to nuclear power, but I don't think they are really bright enough to realize that is our only means of energy right now. Until they come up with something better I'm going to have to back nuclear power.

INT: Do you have any concern about the food or the milk from the area?

NAR: Well, there was reports during the time that we were down here that... we were attending Lamaze classes which was natural childbirth and the woman in charge of the program was saying that there had been iodine found in some of the milk from local dairy farms in the area and that it would be advisable not to drink any milk from this area, but that was the only thing that I was concerned with. I wanted to make sure that when my wife did come back there wasn't some other type of food contaminated. I do a lot of trout fishing and I kind of backed off of that for a while until I found out what was going on. I didn't want to catch some radioactive trout and cook it and eat it for dinner or something like that. So we were a little careful where we bought our products.

INT: Do you fish more now?

NAR: Oh yeah, I'm back into it again now. I don't even think about it.

INT: Do you picture in your mind any effects or radiation on life around you?

NAR: No, not right now.

INT: Did you think of your own death?

NAR: No, I didn't think about my own. I was basically just concerned with just my wife. I worried more about my family more than myself. So I was concerned that I didn't want to see anything happen to our first child and I didn't want to see anything happen to my wife or even to my dog. I thought that was the best move. Just get them out of the area.

INT: You obviously thought you would survive?

NAR: Oh yeah. I never really thought about it one way or the other that I would survive. I know that I've got enough knowledge as soon as I heard something I had my car packed to go and I would have been out of here very quickly. Fortunately, nothing did happen.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: Yes, I did. You know, I would kind of catch myself looking up into the sky and saying "I know you are too powerful to let something like this happen" and fortunately, it didn't happen. I was very much concerned with the whole situation and would look up into the sky like I said and kinda talk to God and ask him "Don't let it happen." Fortunately enough it didn't.

INT: Did you pray about it?

NAR: Mmhm.

INT: What did you pray about?

NAR: Just that my family would be safe and that there would be no further developments 10 years or 15 years down the line where all of a sudden an extreme amount of cancer cases were showing up or something like that. That's what I was mostly concerned about.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Did the idea of Satan come to mind?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you think that the incident was related to God in any way? As in his instructing or disciplining mankind?

NAR: No, I don't feel God disciplines man. Man takes care of himself as far as creating problems, and I think all He does is oversee it, and if we want to accept God into our lives, He's there to be accepted. And I don't think He punishes us for wrongdoings that we do as human beings.

INT: Did you attend a religious service during the incident and if so what kind?

NAR: Actually, I didn't attend church that whole week.

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

NAR: I don't think I've ever heard any strong views either way. You know, it has been mentioned in sermons I've listened to, but there has been no strong viewpoint on how they feel about it.

INT: Do you think religious people or institutions should take any public stand on the human development and use of nuclear power?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: I had a responsibility and a commitment to this newspaper. I felt very strong about that and that's one reason I came back. If I would have been really that upset about it or something, I just that I as a department head have the responsibility to control my end of the business and to help in editorial wherever they needed it. So I did have a commitment to myself that I had to be here, during the whole crisis. Regardless of what happened.

INT: Did you feel that any of responsibilities that you had seemed to conflict?

NAR: No. Well, my parents are in Ithaca and my wife's parents are in Geneva, New York which is just outside of Ithaca and, you know, of course they didn't want me to come back but I knew I had to. It was just something I had to do.

INT: Did you have things to do that you would not otherwise have to do?

NAR: As far as job responsibilities? Not really. Just trying to keep people calm and not panic.

INT: Did you have ideas of how it would be best to behave in such a situation?

NAR: Oh yeah. I, you know, wanted to make sure that I could keep myself calm and cool and collected and try to influence that on my other department heads and my other managers that work for me.

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

NAR: Yeah, the fact that my wife was in New York and me down here, it was a little trying for a while but I did realize that this is my life right now, this newspaper, so therefore it was just something I had to do and that's what I did.

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

NAR: Not really.

INT: Did anything like this happen to you before?

NAR: Mm-mm.

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

NAR: I tell you, when I was in Washington, D.C. I was in Washington, D.C. during the Watergate scandal and I would pick up the Washington Post before I went home to me I was comparing the crisis of it, seeing that our government was falling apart with our president being the biggest ringleader in the whole mess and it was a different type of crisis because nobody would be physically hurt from it, but all in all I feel they were very similar crises that I was involved in. Being that Three Mile Island was a physical crisis and Watergate crisis a mental crisis for a lot of people so I did think about that quite a bit.

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

NAR: It was more frightening than a war. It was something that we had no control over as to what the outcome would be.

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

NAR: Oh yeah, China Syndrome.

INT: Had you seen that?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Before or after?

NAR: After I saw it. It was almost like it was made for this area.

INT: Any books or stories?

NAR: Not that I can recall.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: Not really.

INT: Did you have any daydreams that you remember?

NAR: Just picturing what was going on. From time to time I'd think about it and be thankful that my family was away. I was the only one down here so I'd think about it and try to picture what was really going on inside the reactor and stuff like that.

INT: Have you had any daydreams about it since then?

NAR: No.

INT: Any sleeping dreams at that time?

NAR: Mm-mm. Surprising enough, no.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed in any way?

NAR: When I came back Monday, yes it was because it was still an iffy situation so I was very concerned about it that day. By Tuesday, it was pretty well stated that it was under control and they were slowing shrinking the bubble.

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

NAR: ...I really didn't see any big changes in the people in my department. I think everybody handled themselves very well considering and we talked a lot about it and that was about it. It was hard to concentrate on your work, the day to day responsibilities of

this job but we did talk quite a bit about it and what each person felt and how they reacted to the situation.

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

NAR: Oh, I wouldn't think so.

INT: What jokes did you hear about radiation or Three Mile Island?

NAR: Taking me back to Ithaca again when I was up there, there were all kinds of little slogans and stuff that were being printed in all the newspapers. "I'm a radiant person" there was a picture of a car on the front page with a big sign on it. I forget what the caption was, but it was a little comical thing about the whole situation which you were bound to hear anyway.

INT: Did you hear any new words or funny remarks?

NAR: "Nukes" that was a very common at the time. Other than that, no.

INT: When did you first hear this?

NAR: Just after the whole incident. It had cooled off and people were calming down and going back to their normal responsibilities. But there was a lot of the No Nukes signs out at that time.

INT: If the jokes were meant to be funny, did you laugh at them?

NAR: Yes, because I think you hear them more out of the area than you would in the area. While you were in the area there were no funny jokes going around I didn't think, but if you got away from it where people could laugh at it, they would. They made jokes and comments about it that really didn't make any sense.

INT: Did you tell these jokes to anyone else?

NAR: No. Because I didn't think they were really that funny.

INT: Why do you think there was a lot of joking going on?

NAR: Because of the fact that there were so many conflicting stories and people didn't know what to believe. You know, one radio station or one network would say it was a very very serious thing and Pennsylvania could be blown off the map and another story would say that they have it under control and the bubble was shrinking and everything else so I think that's how all the jokes came around.

INT: Do you remember any joking from other crises like Pearl Harbor, Kennedy assassination, and Cuba?

NAR: Kennedy assassination, Cuba, no. Pearl Harbor, I have no idea.

INT: Jonestown, Guyana?

NAR: There were jokes about Jonestown and there were jokes even about the Watergate scandal.

INT: Can you express your opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: I feel very strongly that until they can find something better we are going to have to live with the fact, you know, that it's here and we've got to use it because that's the only way we are going to survive. If this country is ever going to become self-sufficient, maybe that's the answer. I really don't know, but for the time being, it's something that we create ourselves and therefore we should look into it. I think there should be some stricter guidelines and better control on how these islands are put out and how these nuclear power plants are designed. I think that was a big problem. They were put up in such a hurry that a lot of safety regulations were never checked into. With the Three Mile Island situation now, I think it has opened a lot of people's eyes and they will be watching. In a sense I think it was a good situation. Thank God nobody was hurt or killed, but I think it did open a lot of people's eyes and now they are going to be under constant attack by No Nuke Organizations, but they are going to be well watched by others.

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

NAR: Not really. It's just that I get very turned off by the people that protest nuclear power plants. I feel that if you are going to protest something you better come up with a better answer and they're not coming up with answers. They are just coming up and protesting this thing and I feel that they really don't have any right to, because I don't think they know any more or any less than I do, but I know how I feel about it and until we can come up with a better system, we are going to have to take advantage of it.