

Date: May 11, 1979

Occupation: College student

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

NARRATOR: Let's see. I guess on Wednesday. I don't know what the date was.

INT: Do you remember who you heard it from?

NAR: Yeah, somebody in the house.

INT: What did you think about it at that point?

NAR: I don't know. Well. I don't know, I thought it was something inevitable. I thought it was something that was going to happen. I didn't think it was that serious at the time.

INT: Did you seek out further information?

NAR: Yeah, I listened to the radio, basically all the time, if there was any time.

INT: Did you talk about it with your friends, family or co-workers?

NAR: Sure.

INT: What did you talk about?

NAR: Well, it depends who I was talking with about it. There was one friend I talked about how he could make money by making T-shirts, which we ended up doing. With others, as people started to leave we talked about, you know, having parties and the possibility of schools closing and other friends in the physics department we talked about the count rate and what actually was going on, what the truth was.

INT: How did you feel about the way everybody was reacting to all of this?

NAR: I really felt everyone overreacted. Some people, I think the students didn't take it too seriously but I think the parents wanted them to come home. Or else most students saw it as an excuse to either go home or go on vacation or stay here and have a good time.

INT: Did you follow newspaper, radio, or TV reports?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Do you remember any particular stations?

NAR: Well, the local Carlisle AM station, wherever that is and watched looking, just some news. Just the newscast from what's his name, the head of the nuclear commission or whatever. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

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

NAR: Yeah.

INT: How did you feel about the way the media was handling the incident?

NAR: I think they did a lousy job because there was all kinds of sensationalism and conflicting reports that I heard. And that's one reason, you know I, at one point, I started to get worried because I thought it may be serious because I heard one person mention something about a meltdown and then I heard them talking about it on the news. And, you know, I didn't exactly trust the sources.

INT: Was there any one source you did particularly rely on?

NAR: Yeah, in the physics department here, my physics professor.

INT: And why was that?

NAR: Because I had worked with him in lab and I know what they were dealing with was actual physical evidence that they had taken. Data that they had taken in the labs.

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

NAR: No, other than the fact that school was closed for a week and I did, as we said made T-shirts so that was different.

INT: Did you change any of your ordinary routines?

NAR: No, you know, when I sort of started to believe that school was going to be closed, I didn't study that much, but...

INT: Did you ever feel it was a crisis situation?

NAR: Yeah, I started to believe that over the weekend sometime, Sunday morning I think, or Saturday night.

INT: What did you think about the whole idea of leaving the area? Maybe not as a particularly good way for (unintelligible).

NAR: Of others leaving the area, you mean?

INT: Yes.

NAR: I don't know. I sort of felt that it was useless to leave the area because if there was going to be anything major, then we were already far enough away or else you couldn't get far enough away because the weather conditions would really affect that. And actually probably safer than, than an area like Philadelphia or something.

INT: Did you leave the area?

NAR: I did, but to take care of business. I mean, that was my reason.

INT: How long were you gone for?

NAR: It was until Sunday.

INT: And why was it that you left?

NAR: Well, we had to hire an artist and we had to go to a printer's and buy these shirts.

INT: Did you think about leaving for other reasons at all?

NAR: No, by that time I felt everything was safe and I felt the school had made a mistake in closing down. So, I just made use of the fact that it was a vacation at that point.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was happening at Three Mile Island, or what might happen?

NAR: You mean emotion attached with it? That kind of mental picture?

INT: Yeah, or since you weren't, you might not have been there at all time or just what seemed what was going on at the time? Did you have any, like imaginings of what was happening?

NAR: Well, with the situation, since everybody was coming up with different information. Particularly Met Ed was, Metropolitan Edison and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. What I sort of, you know, I felt that somebody was lying somewhere. And what was really going on was either not known to the people who were directly involved with it or else was not being told to the rest of the people in order to keep us from being scared. And the plans for evacuation sort of confirmed that. They kept talking more and more about evacuation. I kept thinking, well maybe they just haven't told us everything that going on. They are building up to it slowly.

INT: Right. So, were you worried?

NAR: As I said, just at one point. Saturday night or Sunday morning. But the fact that everybody started to leave and there was under ten of us left in the house.

INT: So what worried you the most?

NAR: Just the fact that, you know, all the time I hadn't taken the situation as that serious. I had never. All they were talking about was the fact that the reactor was being shut down and it was heating up and the discussion of meltdown and the fact that a lot of people started to leave and the fact that reports were really conflicting started to worry me because I thought, maybe, I don't know what's going on, maybe they don't know what's going on.

INT: Do you think that anything that happened at Three Mile Island might have affected your health?

NAR: I think that it might have in the sense that, going to the doctor's and having an X-ray affects my health, and I don't like having X-rays taken, but. I don't feel I am, I think the odds of my health being directly affected are very low. I'm not worried about it, I'm just saying in general I like to get as little radiation as possible.

INT: Okay, what other aspects of your life might have been affected?

NAR: Well, I don't know. Locally it kind of messed up the semester, as I am sure it did for everybody. And it made me angry at the school that they had to close down. I thought, they didn't want to but. I could see their position in this, in that a lot of people had left and you run a school without people. But, you know, other than that I enjoyed it because I made some money on it and whatever. It stirred a lot of debate about reactors and things. I have never been for them. At least not in the long run, maybe in the short run. I say they are a good answer to the energy problems, but I think they might have changed some attitudes.

INT: How do you feel about the future development of nuclear power?

NAR: I think the incident itself really, if it didn't kill nuclear power, it certainly set it back to a tremendous extent. As witnessed by the nuclear protesting or whatever against nuclear reactors in Washington last weekend or whatever. A lot of people are going to get up in arms about it and I think they have a right to, to a certain extent. Because I don't think it's a nuclear reactors and the whole process, the position, is well thought out from an engineering standpoint. It's the disposal of waste is what bothers me the most. I think there are other energy alternatives.

INT: Do you think any aspects of the community might have been affected?

NAR: Sure. I mean, as I said. I think attitudes towards nuclear energy are really being changed. And it's tough because the gas shortage in California which is just a prelude to

what is going to happen in certainly the ten years all across America. And we need the energy but we don't need the problems like that, so what are we going to do.

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

NAR: A meltdown.

INT: A meltdown?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Okay, and how do you think it might have affected your health?

NAR: At this distance I wouldn't have been too worried about it. As I say, with prevailing winds and all that I think I would be safer in Carlisle than on the east side.

INT: Do you think other aspects of your life might have been affected?

NAR: By what?

INT: By a meltdown?

NAR: Sure. I have relatives who live in that direction who might have been hurt by that.

INT: Did you picture in your mind any other affects of radiation on life around you?

NAR: Yeah, I mean I was thinking about the environment, that type of thing, how it was affecting the environment.

INT: How was that?

NAR: Well, the animals in the immediate area and the fact that a meltdown was into a river or just the disposal of high temperature wastes into the river would just about wipe it out, the fish and the birds. I don't know what lives (sarcastic) in the Susquehanna River, but whatever.

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

NAR: No, not at all.

INT: What made you uneasy?

NAR: Just the conflicting information. Nobody knew what was going on. They didn't know how it happened for a few days. They didn't, weren't sure when they could predict a final shutdown. They didn't know the size of the bubble inside and this and that. Whatever it was, they didn't. They were very unsure about what was going on. And

their uncertainties enlarged any, you know, if an engineer and people you trusted, that type of thing, you expect a large amount of decision.

INT: Okay, what do you feel about it, looking back on it? Do you feel they were in control?

NAR: No, I still feel the same way.

INT: Do you feel they are in control of the situation as it is now?

NAR: I think the situation has come under control, but that's no compliment to them. I think it just kind of happened that way. And the fact that the situation doesn't exist means it is under their control.

INT: At the time was there anybody you trusted or believe more than others?

NAR: Yeah, I think I answered that one, didn't I? The physics department, the professors in it, our own work over there obviously. Stuff like that.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: Did I think about God... No.

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

NAR: No, no. I was, it was sort of the first thing of that, the first incident of national or international newsworthiness that I felt I was close to and was directly affected by.

INT: Can you think of anything like this that's ever happened in history before?

NAR: Sure, I think it goes along the lines of. I don't think it was treated in the same way, just because if there are some fanatics who might react to it. Especially due to the sensationalism in the news might react to the fact that radiation was leaking out. Which is something invisible, and people, you know, there was pictures in the paper of people covering their mouths thinking that could protect them from the radiation. I mean there's just, it's such a sensationalist thing that I think it was different in that respect that there are other things like the Love Canal where there are all kinds of chemicals and wastes dumped there and mothers have been having deformed children and everyone is just evacuated the area. I think that's umpteen times worse than this.

INT: Do you see this incident as similar or parallel to anything else in your life?

NAR: No, I don't think so.

INT: At the time, did you have any daydreams that you can remember?

NAR: Daydreams? Sure. I mean, you know I... since the future seemed uncertain, at least in my eyes due to the fact that it was uncertain in all the people directly involved with it, like the NRC. They didn't know what was going on. I could imagine all kinds of fantastic things like, not realistically but kind of humorously. Not humorously but. Nuclear type holocausts, that type of thing, being the last few people, just left in the area during evacuation. Imagining what an evacuation would be like.

INT: What did you imagine there?

NAR: Well, I have never been in one and I have never seen one except we would joke around, some of us, about seeing War of the Worlds where, the scene where people were all fleeing the invading Martians or whatever. They are all fighting each other for cars and all this. How funny that would be to see, sort of sickly kind of humor.

INT: Did any other radio shows, TV shows, or movies come to your mind?

NAR: What do you mean, that might parallel this?

INT: Like you thought of it, like this was just like a western. You know, that sort of thing.

NAR: I thought of, whatever the name of that movie is with Jane Fonda that somebody told me they had seen. And I thought how ironic that was, and so many people have said it was really very similar. And I thought how ironic that was.

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

NAR: No, none that I can remember.

INT: Did you think of any songs or lyrics?

NAR: Well, I have a friend in the house who wrote a song. You might say I thought of that just because he sang it.

INT: Do you remember the words?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: Well, basically that's all people talked about, a week or so. And that was the most drastic change. But, I think while everybody talked about it and a lot of people left, the people who were left here felt that it was a good time just to have a good time.

INT: Do you think it changed anybody in a lasting way?

NAR: Not unless some people were directly affected by the radiation and those people being one or two persons who were, who worked at the Three Mile Island reactor who might have come in contact with some waste, something like that. I don't know.

INT: Did your beliefs change at all?

NAR: No. I, you know, I had some basic beliefs about nuclear power and solar power, things like that. That's all.

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

NAR: All kinds of them. People were joking around about flipper babies and. That's I never heard about flipper babies until- I had to have that explained to me. What else, having mutant children about growing a third arm or something like that.

INT: Do you remember if they were serious about this or just kidding?

NAR: No, just kidding.

INT: Do you remember when you first heard these?

NAR: Right away, right from when it started.

INT: Did you think they were funny?

NAR: In passing, you know, mildly.

INT: Did you tell them to other people?

NAR: Yeah, just in the same sort of kidding like in the caustic sense.

INT: Did you see any posters or graffiti?

NAR: Yeah, we had a party and we had posters and from what I understand Phi Ep did.

INT: What did they say?

NAR: Oh, nuclear waste night or something like that. Radioactive punch, things like that.

INT: Do you remember when these parties were, when you saw these posters?

NAR: Umm, Our party was Friday night or Saturday night. So we had posters up, I guess it was Saturday- we had posters up Saturday.



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

NAR: Well, there was the flipper baby one.

INT: What was the flipper baby?

NAR: It was described to me as just a mutant child that doesn't have an arm or something like that.

INT: Can we talk about your T-shirts for a little?

NAR: What about it?

INT: Just like what they said, did you find any reactions in people concerning them? How you got the slogans on them?

NAR: Well, we started thinking about them like Thursday, right when it first happened, my friend Ken Trip and I. We're always trying to think up things like that half seriously and we tried to come up with all kinds of slogans and we ran through a number of them and I guess on Sunday we were all sitting up in John's room. John and Ken and I and another guy, somebody said, we were trying to think of a slogan, and somebody said "and you were worried about the bomb". And we thought that was pretty good because the big discussion, the big debate about nuclear power and energy from nuclear reactions in the forties, back in Einstein's time, was that the bomb was going to devastate the world. There were all kinds of cartoons about the bomb and this is the end of the world. And here we are the bomb has not really affected us to that great of an extent and then all of a sudden nuclear reactors which was the positive side of atomic energy back then has turned around and bitten us. So we put that in the front and we had a picture of a skull with a civil defense helmet which sort of contemporary, kind of Grateful Dead-ish type design and on the back we put Three Mile Island nuclear break a so that people would have a sort of souvenir.

INT: Did you find they were popular?

NAR: Yeah, we regretted that we didn't get that many. We weren't sure about it. It was really something done just for fun, a lot of money was put out for it. We put them on sale, I guess 11 o'clock the next Monday when school convened and they were all gone by 3 o'clock and that was 100 shirts.

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

NAR: I don't know, I think that's just basically a normal reaction, human reaction, especially for young people our age. In a situation where there is a certain amount of stress but it doesn't appear to be that great a stress. In other words, there was a question as to whether the situation was going to be serious or not. But most of us kind of doubted it was going to be that serious.

INT: Can you remember joking from other crises, like the flood, or Guyana, or assassinations, jokes pertaining to those?

NAR: Sure, yeah. Yeah, people joked nothing as specific but the same type of thing, the kind of sick jokes about Guyana, and, you know, Kennedy. Hitler.

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

NAR: No.