

Date: August 3, 1979
Occupation: Telephone Operator

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

NARRATOR: I don't remember the exact date, but when it was on TV, whenever that was.

INT: All right, it was from the television then?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Do you remember if it was Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday?

NAR: Whenever it first happened, I wouldn't remember when it was.

INT: Did you know that the reactor was there before it happened?

NAR: Yes.

INT: How far is the Island from here?

NAR: It is about 20, 25 mile radius by air.

INT: Do you remember what you were thinking about then or what you talked about then?

NAR: I was really scared.

INT: Really? Did you think it was serious?

NAR: Yeah, I really took it serious. More than most people did.

INT: Would you say that it was a crisis?

NAR: Yes, it could have been worse than it was. Well, you didn't know. Nobody really knew what was going to happen even the people that were there, supposedly the experts. They didn't know what was going on for sure. They really didn't give us any answers.

INT: Did you try to find out anything more? Any further information?

NAR: Well, just the news and paper and asking people plus Mike's step dad use to work there.

INT: Do you, what did he do? Was he?

NAR: I'm not sure, but he tried to explain things to us.

INT: So that it was your friends and your family?

INT: People here at work?

NAR: That I spoke with? Yes.

INT: Do you remember what you talked about? Anything specifically?

NAR: Well, about how the radiation would expose and how it made people sick and what it would do if it blew. It was really going to damage a lot of land. We would be the housing for the Dauphin county. My Dad is with the fire department and he had to set up meetings and help how they would be, how they would work it out. And if it was worse, how would we get out. You know, we were planning on what we would do, our own family.

INT: Ok, so you thought it was pretty serious and you were worried about it. Did your attitude change? Did you ever think it at any point did you start to feel differently about it?

NAR: No, I was still concerned the whole time.

INT: How did you feel about the way other people were reacting?

NAR: Some people just thought it was a big joke and some people panicked more than, well, didn't really know how to act. Nothing like that ever happened and people were, took it worse than others. And some people acted like it was not big deal and kind of thought it was a joke.

INT: Did you follow newspapers, radio, and TV?

NAR: Radio and TV mostly.

INT: Do you remember which stations?

NAR: No.

INT: Would you say that you paid more attention to that than you usually do?

NAR: Yes.

INT: How do you think the press handled the whole situation?

NAR: I don't think they handled it very good.

INT: Why?

NAR: Well because first of all they didn't have enough information really because nobody would give out information. Plus there was too many different stories. You'd hear a different one from different stations and different papers would give like contradict to the other one. So you really didn't know which was true.

INT: How did you think government handled it? And that can mean anybody in government, State, Local, Federal.

NAR: Well, I think the President should have done more. He kind of just sat back. He was there, but what did he do?, not much. The governor did try to really be there and gave all his support and really tried, but I think the President could have done more.

INT: How did you think the way Med Ed handled the situation?

NAR: I think they are still thinking about it because they don't know what to do with the money and everything. But I, they still think they are going to open it back up.

INT: How about during the situation, what did you think of Met Ed?

NAR: They didn't know what they were doing. They had their experts there but still they couldn't explain what happened until a couple months later what really happened and they really didn't know what happened. They didn't, it was their fault that they didn't have control of it.

INT: Did you think that they, the people in charge, were in control? Met Ed or the government?

NAR: Well, it was Med Ed mostly, but the government had to support it. So it was really both of them.

INT: Both of them, during the situation, during the crisis, did you think they had control over what was happening?

NAR: No, not really. But Met Ed's specialists should have been able to do something. They didn't know because it had never happened before.

INT: Do you feel that they are in control of it now?

NAR: Yes, more so than before.

INT: Getting back to people you were listening to? Was there anyone that you trusted more than anybody else?

NAR: No, I didn't really believe that the people were telling the truth. I didn't what the television said, that it wouldn't harm you. I still think that it is going to come out later that it did more harm than they predicted it would and it did do.

INT: How about government people and industry people. Do you think that, was there anybody that was more trustworthy between those two?

NAR: No, I really still don't think they know. You know I didn't trust them. I thought it could blow anytime and it could of, but they got it under control.

INT: Alright, you said a little earlier you were worried about the situation. What worried you the most out of everything that was happening?

NAR: Well, that it could have blown any time. It could have ruined the land. It could have, like the radiation that they had in the milk, whatever. That is going to hurt more people in all the surrounding areas, and the land would be messed up.

INT: Now when you say it could have blown, what do you mean by that? An explosion or a meltdown or?

NAR: Whenever they had too much water in it, the pressure was so great that there was a possibility that the top could have blown and then all the radiation would have been exposed and who knows what else.

INT: At the time did you make any plans that were different from plans that you would have made?

NAR: Yes, I tried to stay out of the area. I go down to Harrisburg a good bit and Dauphin area. I tried to stay out of the area and I called friends and relatives down there and told them if anything happened they could come stay with us. We just tried to stay more together. Know what people were doing and where they were in case something would happen.

INT: Did you change any of your ordinary routines? Like what you do after work or before or at work, did you change any of those? And I don't mean just work. Did you change *any* routine?

NAR: Well, like I was supposed to go to the doctor and stuff in Harrisburg. I wouldn't go down because of it. Because of the traffic and everything.

INT: Because of the way it was?

NAR: Yeah. It was too crowded and plus I didn't want to go down into the area.

INT: What did you think about leaving this area?

NAR: Well, we considered it. We were going to if things got worse. I was going to leave at one time and go to Pittsburgh for the weekend just to get away from it but we didn't.

INT: Alright. So you did think about leaving, but you stayed?

NAR: Yes.

INT: What made you stay?

NAR: MY working. You know if it would have become much worse I would have left. I'm not sure where we would have went for sure but we were thinking about it.

INT: If you had gone, what would you have taken with you?

NAR: Just a few clothes, money and things most valuable.

INT: Do you have any idea what those would have been?

NAR: My jewelry that, my valuable jewelry and just a suitcase with some clothes in it. I don't know if I would have took my car or not. I probably would have left it behind.

INT: Do you think you would have come back?

NAR: Maybe. I don't know. Probably eventually but, it depends on how bad it was.

INT: Is there somebody in your life, friend, family, whatever, that you were watching in order to decide what you were going to do?

NAR: My father, because he was at the fire company and he went to the courthouse with meetings and everything and he could tell us more what was going to go one if something did happened.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures, images that you could see in your mind about what was happening down there or might happen?

NAR: What might happen. It could really have been everybody panicking and just getting in their cars and getting out. And cause while some places were pretty full from the Harrisburg area from evacuation.

INT: Did you think of what might happen at Three Mile Island itself, at the Island?

NAR: No, not really because I really couldn't, you know, I didn't know what was going to happen.

INT: Do you think that anything that happened might have affected your health, either now or in the future?

NAR: Yes, I still think that later on they are going to find out that people have been exposed more than they said. And it's going to cause problems. I don't know what kind or anything, they really can't tell at this point.

INT: Do you have any idea what kind of problems, anything?

NAR: Health problems of some sort, maybe even just the mental from everybody being under stress.

INT: Getting away from your health, what other aspects of your life might have been affected?

NAR: Well, socially I guess you could say because people were kind of on the panic, they didn't want to go away too far, had to be ready to pick up and go if it came to worst.

INT: Were you sort of thinking about packing a suitcase and keeping it ready?

NAR: Yeah, I knew what I was going to take if worse came to worse. It wouldn't take me long to get out.

INT: How about in your community, the place where you live. How did it affect that?

NAR: Well, I really can't say. I really didn't talk to the neighbors that much about what they felt. So I really don't know.

INT: Alright, the community where you live. Were there any official plans to?

NAR: Yeah, like in the fire company where my Dad belongs to, they had it all arranged how they were gonna, at the Courthouse and everything, how they were going to evacuate people from the Dauphin area, bring them up to Cumberland County. Like we would have had to house some people ourself in our home.

INT: If the worst had happened, whatever you think is the worst, what would have happened?

NAR: We would have had to leave because of it being so bad. I don't know, whatever happened we would have had to leave.

INT: How do you think that that might have affected your health? The absolute worse.

NAR: Well, I wouldn't have wanted to leave everything behind. If we would have left there would have probably been a lot of looting and everything and then if we ever did want to come back your things would be gone and everything would be all messed up.

But I think it really have a jolt of mental on you because something like that, it could have been worse. Who knows what would have happened.

INT: How do you think the worst might have affected what you said about health problems? Do you think it would have had any affect that way?

NAR: I don't know what you mean.

INT: Alright. Some people were saying that a meltdown would release all this radiation, and like you said a little earlier about the land being damaged. Do you think any of that would have, the absolute worst, how do you think it would have affected your health? If you couldn't get out in time?

NAR: Well, you wouldn't have gotten any fruit and vegetables from around here. It wouldn't be good for you. You'd have to ship them here. It would be worse. And like the milk would be harder to get. Because you couldn't take it to the dairy down in Harrisburg. Get it processed.

INT: Were you worried about the food and the milk from Harrisburg?

NAR: Yes. Because the milk, little kids and everything drink that. It might affect them later on in their life.

INT: Getting back to mental pictures, did you have any pictures about what the area would look like if the worst had happened?

NAR: All I could think of was burnt grass from some reason. I don't know why. Like a fire effect, but I don't know.

INT: Everything burnt or just burnt fields?

NAR: Fields and grass and dead cows laying around. That's all I could think of.

INT: Did you ever think of dying? Or of your own death?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you think of anybody else dying?

NAR: Yes. I thought of like the mothers that were pregnant and stuff. They might have still born births or something like that.

INT: But you thought you'd survive? You and your family?

NAR: I thought we were far enough out of range.

INT: Is that what reassured you about it?

NAR: Yes.

INT: During the incident did you think about God?

NAR: Yes.

INT: And how did God figure in all this?

NAR: Well, maybe it was something to make us think; and people stick together as a community and help each other.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Can you tell me what you prayed about?

NAR: Well, just to help us through this bad time and I don't know.

INT: Did you go to church?

NAR: I don't remember, probably but, working in here I don't remember.

INT: During the incident did you feel that you had responsibilities?

NAR: Yes.

INT: What kind?

NAR: Well, my mom works away, to take care of my sister and check on her and make sure she is alright.

INT: How old is your sister?

NAR: She's 11. And if something would happen I would be responsible to get things together and to get going, plus Pam. I was thinking about talking her with us since her parents aren't around here.

INT: Did you feel you had responsibilities towards anything else, other than your family?

NAR: I guess not.

INT: Did any of the responsibilities you had, even towards your family, did they seem to conflict?

NAR: Sort of because well, some people said that my Dad, I don't think he would have went with us. He didn't know if he wanted to go or not because he would have been helping out. And that was kind of rough because my Mom probably wouldn't want to drive by herself and I would have been responsible for that. Getting us somewhere. Because I don't know if we were going to go to Florida to my Uncle's or where.

INT: How would you, how do you think you would have resolved your father staying here with the fore company and you leaving?

NAR: I wouldn't have like it too good, but I. Well, if he had to do it he had to do it.

INT: Was your job affected by Three Mile Island?

NAR: Yes, it was awful busy here and it was really scary because whenever, like everything really started to break on the TV I was working and everything just went wild. And you didn't know what was going on. You, thought, you didn't know if you were going to live the next minute or not. You didn't know what was going to happen really. And just everybody just panicked, and you had to put all these calls through and everything was really busy.

INT: I know it's isolated back there. How did you find out what was happening? Word of mouth?

NAR: Somebody was out here on break and come in and said something about Three Mile Island being on TV. I don't remember exactly what all he said, just like everything went wild and it was like "What's happening? Are we going to live or not? What *is* happening? Is it going to blow up like a bomb or what?"

INT: Were people asking operators?

NAR: Not too much. We're really not supposed to say anything. But we just said we're having problems with Three Mile Island. I don't really remember what all we said, but you know we jus tried to put them through and keep them calm. People were really getting upset because everybody was calling here from out of state and we were calling everywhere else for our customers. It was pretty hard to get through. The lines were all tied up. Especially down near Middletown. That was ridiculous to get through there. You might as well just forget it.

INT: Those lights were on?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: All the time?

NAR: For days.

INT: Didn't go out?

NAR: Oh yeah, they went out, but you know. It was busy all the time. There wasn't too much time that you just sat there for even a minute or two.

INT: Did you have things to do that you wouldn't have ordinarily had to do? Whether at work or at home?

NAR: Not really, except that it was more busy in here, and more stressful because you really didn't know and you couldn't tell what was going on the news and stuff. You just sit here and wondered.

INT: How did that affect people?

NAR: They really, they really didn't know how to accept it. They just kind of panicked and got all upset and everything.

INT: That is the customers you are talking about?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: How about people in here?

NAR: Everybody was kind of upset about it, too.

INT: Do you have any ideas about the best way to behave in a situation like that?

NAR: Well, the best is to just stay calm but whenever you really didn't know what was happening, what were you suppose to do. It could have been? You know. Who knows, it could have blew up like a bomb or something, and I don't know.

INT: Did you try to stay calm?

NAR: Well, I tried to, it wasn't too easy at times.

INT: What made it hard?

NAR: Because you didn't know. You didn't know what was going to happen. How did you know if they were telling you the truth, because I didn't believe them. And they really didn't tell you that much. They just came on and went into details that you didn't even understand.

INT: So that not knowing was what made it hard for you?

NAR: Yeah, because you didn't know what to expect. You had no idea, nothing like that ever happened and everybody in the whole county was wondering about it. Like other nuclear plants and governments, just relatives, family, friends.

INT: Would you say, alright, did the event, did the incident down there bring to mind, make you think of anything in the past, other experiences, other events?

NAR: Yeah, like there was some kind of a. I can't remember exactly, in Gettysburg, there was some kind of a bad fire. There was like 2 things like that a week before and the week afterwards. And it was chemicals that exploded and everything in a bad fire and it burnt houses and everything.

INT: Yeah, I remember that.

NAR: It just, there is no control over things like this anymore. It seems like nobody really cares. If they would go on back roads or something instead of trying to go on main towns with chemicals which half the time the driver don't even know what they are in, what they are getting themselves into. They could get killed like that. It would be better if they could do it that way. Take back roads where its not, its less crowded than going through the main part of town.

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

NAR: No.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Would you say that what happened at Three Mile Island was more frightening or not as frightening as something like a flood or a war or a fire, a bad fire, a hurricane or a bad storm?

NAR: Well, it's probably about as bad as a war. But I don't, I have never been around a war so I don't know.

INT: Did any TV shows, or movies, or books, or stories come to mind during the whole thing, during the incident?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs or telling any stories about radiation, about Three Mile Island?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any day dreams or sleeping dreams about it since?

NAR: No. I remember it was hard to sleep a couple times.

INT: You did have trouble sleeping?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Why?

NAR: Just thinking, when I wake up are we going to be here in the morning or not? Because you didn't really know.

INT: Did you notice any changes in people around you?

NAR: Yeah, there were. I know some people in here were packed, ready to leave. I know some people that did leave the area, I know people that lived in Middletown that left the area. I know people from Dickinson that left the area. Their parents made them get out, get away back to where they were.

INT: Did that surprise you about them? Do you think that they normally would react that way?

NAR: No.

INT: Do you think they changed? Do you think they are going to react differently to things like this from now on? Do you think?

NAR: Yes, they will be more cautious, plan things out better and maybe not panic as much because it has now happened before.

INT: Do you think you'll change that way?

NAR: Yes.

INT: How, how do you think you are going to change?

NAR: Well, if something like this happened again I'd try to stay more calm, but that's sort of hard today. I'd stay here. I guess I'd try to stay here and I wouldn't want to leave. But if worse came to worse I would.

INT: Did you hear jokes, stories about Three Mile Island?

NAR: Oh, yeah. Bumper stickers and the shirts and all that.

INT: Do you remember any of them?

NAR: No. I can't remember what they were.

INT: Did you remember any funny stories, did you say any yourself?
When you think about it, do you come up with any reason why people would joke about something like that?

NAR: Maybe just to try and forget how bad it was. IF you make a joke about it, it won't seem as bad as it is, or was.

INT: Do you remember any jokes from anything else, any other crisis?

NAR: No.

INT: Finally, have you developed an opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: Well, I always thought it was good. I've been down there before and I've toured the center and I always thought it was good because it was saving energy, but there has to be a better, safer way than this. They can maybe, they needed more research before they put it into effect of something like this which would happen which they didn't plan for. They need more in that line.

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

NAR: That's everything.