

Date: July 19, 1979

Occupation: Telephone company service representative

INTERVIEWER: When did you first hear about the Three Mile Island incident? Do you remember?

NARRATOR: I guess it was the day they stated there was a radiation leak. I don't know the exact date, though.

INT: Do you remember who you heard it from?

NAR: It was on the radio.

INT: Do you remember what station?

NAR: The station that we have on here in the office.

INT: That's a FM station?

NAR: Yes, from Harrisburg.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: Do you know how far it is away from Carlisle?

NAR: Not before the accident.

INT: Do you know how far it is now?

NAR: It's about 20 some miles, I don't know.

INT: When you first heard about it, what did you think about it at that point?

NAR: No real concern because the reports were a little vague about the whole accident. Just that some radiation was released and that there wasn't any real danger so I wasn't really involved in the distance away from the plant. It didn't seem to matter to me right now.

INT: Did you think it was serious?

NAR: Not from the news that I had heard on the radio.

INT: It wasn't a crisis?

NAR: No.

INT: Right then, did you try to find out anything more about it?

NAR: No, because I wasn't that concerned about it.

INT: Did you talk about it right then with anybody you work with, your family, your friends?

NAR: We had a little discussion with co-workers, but nothing really detailed.

INT: Do you remember what you talked about?

NAR: Not really. (chuckles)

INT: Did your attitude toward the whole thing change?

NAR: As more reports came in, yes.

INT: Do you remember why...?

NAR: We were more concerned. Every...so many vague reports and conflicting reports.

INT: How did you think about the way other people reacted?

NAR: Well, as the accident got worse we knew more and more people were evacuating and it affected us here at work because they gave us an idea of what we should do if we had to evacuate and you just tried to think about things you would have to do if you were forced to evacuate.

INT: Did you follow the newspapers or radio or TV?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Do you remember any particular stations?

NAR: Well ABC News.

INT: The network?

NAR: Yes. The local TV stations and radio stations.

INT: Do you think you paid more attention to these than you usually do?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Overall, how do you feel about the way the press was handled the situation?

NAR: I think they handled it in as in any press coverage would be involved in a situation as this. They gave you what they had. Sometimes they made it seem worse than it was because you got conflicting reports so you didn't know who to believe, the government, the state government, the federal government or the Metropolitan Edison. You just... everything was conflicting and you didn't know who to believe.

INT: How did you feel about the government officials handled the situation?

NAR: I think Denton tried to keep a calm lid on everything but he laid the facts out for you. He had a rather calming influence on you because he let you know they were trying to do what they could but certain things could happen. State government, I think they were just more or less just following the federal lead. Whatever the federal government went with, that's what they had too. As the county government we really didn't get too involved with Cumberland County other than they started their evacuation plans and try to get those ready.

INT: How do you feel about the way Met Ed handled it?

NAR: Poorly. (chuckles)

INT: All right.

NAR: There's not much more I could say about that. They just...it wasn't handled on a professional level. I think they had mismanagement all around.

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

NAR: You mean officials?

INT: Anybody, the press, the officials?

NAR: I think Harold Denton had a calming effect.

INT: Because he...

NAR: His mannerisms and the way he presented his facts, he didn't... he didn't, he let you know you could be alarmed and what could happen but also that they were going what they could and that's about all I can remember about who I trusted.

INT: Was there anybody you particularly didn't trust?

NAR: Metropolitan Edison officials. No one in particular just every time they came out with a report it was always in conflict of other agencies.

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

NAR: Do you mean the plant people or federal people?

INT: Anybody. Everybody. You could set it up either way.

NAR: Well, I don't think the plant had anything in control. I think they were just a mishmash of following whatever they could. One time they would try this, one time they would try that. Federal, I think, they just had to go with the situation on a day to day basis and follow it as they could and do what they could and then the state and the county government just had to follow it along with them. There just wasn't anybody that knew what to do because it never happened before, and they had so many things that had an effect on the outcome of one event if something would happen. And then if something else happened than it changed everything else.

INT: Do you feel now that those in charge were in control? Do you feel any differently now about it?

NAR: I think the people, the NRC, I felt that now perhaps they didn't know what was going on but the way they handled it and everything turned out okay. Maybe if there would have been a catastrophe I would have felt different.

INT: Are they in control now?

NAR: I think they are taking a closer look at everything. Nuclear power in general and also now specifics as to safety features for the various plants.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: The more information that came from the media and the conflicting reports, yes. It caused some worry about evacuation especially when they started telling us up in this area that we might have to evacuate.

INT: Is that worried you the most?

NAR: Yes. I think so. We didn't know where we would go. We live on a farm. How we were going to . . . what we were going to do with our animals, also what was going to happen afterwards if there was a catastrophe. What would we do?

INT: Did you make any plans different from the type of plans you would ordinarily make?

NAR: I think we stayed closer to the house. We didn't go too far and stayed indoors as much as we could to avoid possible radiation. We have a physician that lives next door to us and he took a meter count and we didn't have any great excess amount of radiation so we weren't overly concerned but he was keeping us informed on the radiation levels.

INT: Did you trust him too?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you change any of your ordinary routine? Aside from staying inside?

NAR: Not really, just listened to the news a little bit more than usual. That's all.

INT: What did you think about leaving?

NAR: Leaving the area?

INT: Right.

NAR: If we had to, we were going to. We were going to try to stay as long as we could because of our conditions at home, keeping our animals and things.

INT: So you didn't leave?

NAR: No, we didn't leave.

INT: But you did think about it.

NAR: Only if we had to. If we were told to leave, we were going to leave.

INT: What made you stay? What convinced you to stay?

NAR: I guess that we weren't ordered to leave. We just had the option to leave or to stay and the fact that our, the contingency plans for the evacuation didn't quite reach the area which I live so we more or less stayed for those two reasons.

INT: If you had left or if you thought about leaving, what did you want to take with you?

NAR: Essentials.

INT: Just that?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Is there somebody in your life, a friend or whatever, that you were watching in order to decide whether to leave?

NAR: No.

INT: At the time did you have any sort of mental pictures of what was happening at TMI? Or what might happen?

NAR: I think from the movie The China Syndrome. I based a lot of assumptions on that.

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

NAR: Right now we don't really know. We'll never know until years later. It's a possibility. The cancer level in the area may rise but we don't know.

INT: Outside of your health are there any other aspects of your life which you think might have been affected?

NAR: No. I don't think . . . I think you just had an emotional strain for a few days, but that's about all.

INT: How about in your company? In Carlisle, or whatever?

NAR: I think the whole general area was affected emotionally because of the conflicting reports, the way the situation was handled. We weren't sure what was happening and when it was going to happen and to whom.

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

NAR: I picture Hiroshima. That's all I can say. That's what I pictured.

INT: How do you think it might have affected your health? The worst?

NAR: I don't think I would be alive. (short chuckle)

INT: Other aspects of your life?

NAR: I just picture total wasteland. Devastation.

INT: Did you have any concern at the time about the food or milk from that area?

NAR: You mean contamination?

INT: Yes.

NAR: For the general residents around that area I was wondering if anything would be contaminated. Being on a farm I realize, you know, that the farmers down in that situation are in a predicament about their milk and whether the people will be allowed to sell it or not. But for myself, I didn't have any concerns.

INT: Did you picture in your mind any effects of radiation? On life around you?

NAR: Oh... What? Do you want to repeat that?

INT: Okay. Did you picture in your mind any effects that radiation might or radiation alone might have on life around you?

NAR: No, I just thought about the radiation from the information that I got from the Geiger counter readings I was told it was nothing more than just a chest X-ray right now, and people are being exposed to so I wasn't really concerned about radiation right then.

INT: Did you think about dying?

NAR: Only if the meltdown would have occurred.

INT: You thought about others dying?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you think that you would survive?

NAR: If the melt down had occurred, I didn't, I wasn't quite sure whether we would survive or not. I didn't know the full impact of what the meltdown would involve. I thought of catastrophic things at times, and other times from reports you received you thought perhaps they could control it and it wouldn't be as bad as they were talking about.

INT: What reassured you about survival? Was it the reports or...?

NAR: I thought it was lots. The reports started to get good and so you felt a little bit better about the whole situation and then just the hope that everything was going to turn out okay and there wasn't going to be any catastrophe.

INT: During the incident, did you think about God?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you feel that you had any kind of responsibility during the incident? Whether towards your family, your job...

NAR: No, not really. If the situation occurred where we had to evacuate, then I would have thought about responsibilities and all. But without having to evacuate, I didn't have any responsibilities that I really considered important enough to consider.

INT: Was your job affected by TMI?

NAR: Yes. Many people evacuated. I work with accounts that are delinquent and we had quite a time processing those. (chuckles)

INT: Did you have things to do that you otherwise wouldn't have had to do? Any special duties?

NAR: Not for the company, no.

INT: Okay. Any others?

NAR: No. Just if we would have had to evacuate, there would have been people I would have probably would have helped get ready.

INT: How did knowing that effect you?

NAR: Emotionally or physically?

INT: Either. Both.

NAR: I think emotionally I was scared until everything was determined, it was going to be no meltdown and everything was going to be okay, the hydrogen bubble was going to disappear. And I think emotionally and physically for a couple days I was a little unnerved. That's about all.

INT: Did you have any thoughts or any ideas about the best way to behave in a situation like this?

NAR: Just try to be calm.

INT: Did you try that?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Was there anything that made it hard to be calm?

NAR: At the height of the crisis, the reports. You had so many reports. You didn't know who to believe. I went more or less, with the national news coverage, and listened to them.

INT: At the time, did the incident, the event, bring to mind any past experiences you had? Anything either in your life or in history?

NAR: I think I thought about the nuclear bombs exploding. Like in Hiroshima. Things that would have occurred during that time in history.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Was it similar in any way else to anything else in your life?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you think that this incident or situation was more or less frightening than something like a flood or a fire or hurricane?

NAR: I think this was more frightening because you had so many unknown conditions. Where as a natural disaster, if it's water or something like that, you know you can evacuate. You can go back and rebuild. With nuclear, you're not quite sure what to expect.

INT: This is a giveaway. Did any TV shows or movies come to mind?

NAR: China Syndrome. (chuckles)

INT: What made you think of that?

NAR: It was in the area, just at the right time.

INT: Any books or stories come to mind?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs or any childhood rhythms, rhymes, or something like that?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any daydreams that you can remember?

NAR: No.

INT: Have you had any since?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any dreams while you were asleep at the time?

NAR: Not that I remember.

INT: Have you had any since that you remember?

NAR: About TMI? No.

INT: You weren't dreaming anything connected with it?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any trouble sleeping?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Why or how?

NAR: Just at the height of the whole incident. You were a little unnerved. Listening for that fire siren to go off. To tell you to get out or something like that.

INT: Is that how you would have known?

NAR: Through the night they had told us that if the fire siren had gone off, that you should get ready to evacuate.

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

NAR: I think every one grew a little bit more tense. But I don't recall any physical changes. You know, like somebody eating a lot or anything like that, you know. But of course, everybody handles the emotional upheavals in different ways.

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

NAR: I think people are more aware of the possibilities that could happen, with nuclear power or that type of incident. Because we don't know that much about it and we're depending on federal government to be have safety regulations and prevent possible things like this happening.

INT: Do you think it changed you in any ways?

NAR: I'm more concerned about it now.

INT: About...?

NAR: Nuclear power in general. Safety regulations, where they're going to build then, how they're going to build them, whose going to build them.

INT: Did you see or hear of any jokes or limericks, anything like that?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Do you remember them?

NAR: I remember one sign in the operator lounge about a resort. They had TMI written up as a resort area for sale, I don't remember how it was worded. It was cute.

INT: Do you remember when you first saw it?

NAR: It was about a week afterwards.

INT: Did you laugh at it?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did anybody else laugh?

NAR: I assume so. I just looked at it. I was the only one there at the time.

INT: Did you tell anybody else about it?

NAR: Yes, co-workers.

INT: Why do you think there was joking?

NAR: Release of tension.

INT: Do you remember any jokes or anything else like that from other crises?

NAR: The only thing I've been through so far are the floods we've had in the area. I really haven't been affected by those. I've known people who have, but personally I have not been that affected. This is the only one I know about. That they really joked about

this type of incident. A joke or a limerick or anything that could have been made out of it. I guess because it was a release of tension. It's a way to be unafraid of the unknown.

INT: You mentioned a little bit ago that you think about nuclear energy a lot. Can you give me some sort of an idea about what kind of an opinion you have of it?

NAR: I think right now, I would want to have more regulations, as to where a plant could be built. Populated areas are not a good place. Especially when things like this are going to occur. But with the gas crisis and the oil crisis we have now, you don't have too much choice which way we can go. So, I guess I'd be for nuclear energy if I knew there were enough safe guards. And the plants were going to be built as safe as they could possibly be. And that our future generations wouldn't have to have the possibility of a melt down or any other catastrophe happening as a result of the nuclear.