

July 19, 1979

Occupation: Telephone Installer

INTERVIEWER: When did you first hear about TMI? About the incident?

NARRATOR: I heard it on the... on the radio, on that Wednesday morning. Somewhere around noon time I was near a radio when I heard.

INT: Do you remember what station it was?

NAR: I believe the station they have in here, WTPA FM.

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

NAR: Yes.

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

NAR: Like 20 some miles, somewhere in that area.

INT: Do you remember back then what you thought about, and what you talked about to anybody else: right then when you first heard about it?

NAR: I talked to a few of the fellows here at work... Well, when I first heard about it, it did sort of scare me. Hearing about the reactor like this. I didn't really think it too much of serious for the first couple of days. Until they finally went and said they had a real problem.

INT: At first then, you didn't think it was serious?

NAR: No.

INT: Or a crisis or anything like that?

NAR: Right, right. When I first, the first day I heard about it, no.

INT: Did you remember why you didn't really feel that way?

NAR: Well, I never really heard anything bad about it, you know. Didn't know a whole lot about it, reactors and such. I did since. Not at the time. Not too much about it.

INT: Do you remember if you sought out any further information?

NAR: Well, it was the funniest thing. It happened on Wednesday, and I guess, or maybe Friday I guess. I get National Geographic. And they had a whole complete article on these nuclear reactors. And of course, I read that whole article and remember saying this couldn't happen and this wouldn't happen. Of course they should pictures and all. It explained a lot of it to me. I could see it there and instead of knowing if it was hear say or something.

INT: Do you remember if you talked about it with your friends or the people you work with or your family?

NAR: Yep. I talked about it with my family. Also with friends and my brothers.

INT: What did you talk about? Do you remember specifics?

NAR: Well, we...Basically we talked about if in case would happen where would we go. What were going to do, and of course I had two children. I was thinking about them. Then they were saying about, you know, possible maybe evacuating the area. I became alarmed, but...

INT: Then your attitude changed. Do you remember when?

NAR: I guess it was around Friday when they were saying about a possible evacuation. That's when I talked to my wife. Basically, I thought about what would happen if this thing would go off. They said the reactor would have melted down. How long there it would take us to get back in this area. It might have been 20 years you know, before we could come back without contamination.

INT: Do you remember how you thought the other people were reacting? Did you remember how you thought about that, about how they were thinking about it?

NAR: Well, I had a neighbor. And he sort of overreacted. He was single, he had his girlfriend there. And that actually got to the point there where he was scared. He took off. He went to her home in Connecticut. They went to Connecticut for the weekend. Said he was getting out of here. Said this thing was going to go. I told my wife, I said, it's good you know but I can't see getting yourself getting to mass confusion, getting hysterical about it. It's not going to go off this instant. You have a chance of 2 or 3 hours. Or 12 hours, something like that to leave. But I didn't make no moves to pack up everything up. At that time anyhow.

INT: We'll come back to that a little bit later. Okay. Did you follow the newspapers or the radio or TV?

NAR: I followed everything.

INT: Do you remember which station? Any particular sources or papers?

NAR: I watched Channel 27. I watch that most of the time as far as the news.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: How do you think the press or the media handled the situation?

NAR: I'd say at first... Then they got a little carried over board. Then they were trying to get the news out, you know. Be the first one to say this or that. Once it became a serious problem, I think they were trying to report the facts as close as they could. When it first came out, they were just trying to get a story. And once they found out how serious it was, I think they changed their minds and decided to give people the facts rather than just try to make up a story to make it sound good or something.

INT: How do you think the government people handled it?

NAR: You mean the NRC or...?

INT: The NRC.

NAR: I think they did an outstanding job. Considering you know, what happened. I think they saved... cause I don't think they had people down there that were qualified enough

to handle the situation. I think they come in, and at least restored a little order to it. Did what they had to. To get the thing settled down.

INT: How about Met Ed?

NAR: Well, at least what I heard so far, I don't think they've kept on talking the thing as much, I think they was passing it off on little things here and there. And saying, well, you know, well, we don't need to repair this and we don't need to repair that. I think they, something like this happened, I think they should have kept closer tabs on it. In other words, every little problem should have been accounted for, you know, investigated. I think the NRC should be in on it, in other words, keep closer track on those people. So they do keep everything up the way it should be. It should be working right all the time.

INT: Was there anybody that you thought was particularly reliable? Anybody that you trusted more than others?

NAR: That Harold Denton, I definitely trusted him because he came out and he... He kept his cool under the whole thing. He just said this is what we have at this time and this is what we can do. I think he did an outstanding job.

INT: Why? Was there anything about him that was...?

NAR: The way he went about his things. In other words, he was there. They tried to get different stories out of him and he told them exactly what the trouble was, and what we had to do. He was telling the truth. Before they was trying to cover it up, and then he finally found out what it was and told the people that. He did a real good job.

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

NAR: No, not really. Not that I can think of. Other than maybe Met Ed themselves. Because the people there, the guys that shut it off... They were just going according to what they were told probably. I guess they didn't really know just what the problem they really did have. I can't really blame it on them, because they probably never did have enough years experience and you know, stuff like this, to know what was going to happen to it.

INT: Did you think that the people that were in charge over there were in control of the situation?

NAR: First couple of days, no, I don't believe they were. Till the NRC come in. Once they come in I think they, they let's put it this way had people at ease a little more. I don't know whether they might have had it under control or if they had people at least saying, you know, maybe we have a chance of getting this thing. Before, I don't know if they knew... what was going to happen to it.

INT: What reassured you about the NRC? As opposed to say the Met Ed people?

NAR: I believe that on, let's see it was probably Sunday and Monday, you know, after the weekend. They said there was still a possibility, but they were trying to repair things here and there. They said they were at least making a little head way. Trying to get the bubble down. I sort of felt they were going to get it under control.

INT: Do you feel now that those in charge had control? Have you changed your thinking at all about that?

NAR: You mean as far as Met Ed, you mean, having it under control?

INT: Met Ed or the NRC?

NAR: I'd say I don't think Met Ed actually never had it under control for the last couple years. I think they just left everything go and say well I guess they didn't want the expense of repairing things or doing things, but the NRC I think definitely knew what they were doing once they came, they went right to work and got . . . I'd say Met Ed I don't believe for sure. Because of all the things that have come out since then like little things here, valves are shut off and they never bothered to repair this and other things that should have been updated and they never changed that and they sort of passed it off and said we can get away without this. I think that was the biggest thing.

INT: Are they in control now? Do you think?

NAR: I think now they are because they know they have the NRC watching them plus the whole world is watching them. I think they are gonna, I say it's a hard way to do it but I think they learned a lesson on nuclear power. It's not just something they can just say well, if this don't work we will just let it go and things are gonna work . . . well . . . it's something that we need but they are going to have to keep better control of it and keep everything working the way it should be and keep updating, you know, and keep things as safe as possible.

INT: Then, were you worried about the situation?

NAR: You mean afterwards?

INT: While it was going on.

NAR: Yeah, I was to a point, yeah. Up until the beginning of that week they finally started to get the bubble down. It had me bothered because if something would have happened in the area, the biggest thing would be that I'd lose my home and when would I get back to my home you know. If something would have happened, how many years would it be until I ever get back to my area. That was the biggest thing that had me bothered.

INT: Was that, you think, what worried you the most?

NAR: I'd say yeah. That and my children. I just wanted to make sure that they weren't going to get exposed if I could help it. But they told me that except in a certain area and they told me not to go down to the area in which I wouldn't have went either way. But I tried to do I said to "Keep your children in" and so I tried to do that.

INT: Did you make any plans that were different from what you ordinarily would have made?

NAR: I hadn't, I didn't as far as I didn't call nobody on it or nothing like this, but I had something going in case something would happen it would be a matter of time in order to get all my personal belongings and everything and extra money or something like that you need to move to an area. We figured that out what we were going to do in stuff like that in case something would happen. Now we...didn't sit down and draw anything up but we had a general idea of something would come close, an hour or two we could have had all our stuff and going.

INT: You just, in other words, started to get prepared?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you change any of your ordinary routine anything that you usually do during the day? In the course of the day? Did you change any of that?

NAR: Not a whole lot. Not that I know of. May not have rode my motorcycle or something like that would be about the only thing.

INT: What did you think about leaving? What would have made you leave?

NAR: If they would have come out and stated that we were within an area where radioactive could have come down or something. For me myself I don't know whether I would have left but with the two children, I . . . of course they still have their whole life to live and they are young and I would have moved the children.

INT: You didn't leave then?

NAR: No.

INT: But you did think about leaving.

NAR: Yeah.

INT: What was it that made you stay?

NAR: The biggest thing was just listening to the television and listening to that Harold Denton and talking and saying that they were showing signs of them trying to get the thing under I believe that was the biggest thing, I believe if they'd come in there and said thing kept getting worse and the bubble was getting closer or something like that there, I don't know. But they said things weren't getting any worse than what they were once they got them settled down by that Saturday, didn't get them settled down, but had them under control and little bit that Saturday or Sunday.

INT: Did you actually plan out where you would have gone?

NAR: No, not really, I don't know for sure where we would have went. We have friends in Ohio. I was thinking about calling them or something like that there. I never really thought for sure where I would go and also my brother had a cabin up above Chambersburg — 20 mile on the other side of Chambersburg and I thought I would go up there because well, actually my brother called and said that we could go up there and use his cabin there which is about 50 mile or 60 mile below here so we possibly would have gone up there instead.

INT: If you had gone, what did you want to take?

NAR: Mostly my personal belongings and valuables and stuff like that and of course all the personal papers and things like that I would have. That would have been the biggest thing maybe a few items that were keepsake items and things like this, I would have took but what I could have got in my car I would have took, I wouldn't have rented a U-Haul or nothing like that. Not that I know of. But I could have gotten in my car.

INT: Was there anyone or a friend or someone in your family that you were watching or keeping an eye on to decide whether to leave or not?

NAR: No. . . (unintelligible) I was talking with my wife was the biggest thing. I listened to the television and we talked it over and of course my wife said a couple times, . . . “Do you think we ought to go” and I said we’ll stick around and see what’s going to happen first.

INT: So that it was just things were getting a little bit better?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: At the time, did you think about, did you get any sort of a picture in your mind about what was happening down there? Or of what might have happened?

NAR: I had some. I had some idea what might happen or something like that.

INT: Can you tell me about it? Is it detailed or anything like that?

NAR: No, not really. I just thought of what might happen if all of sudden this thing would blow up and you’d have all this radioactive material and all these people all rushing and there’d be a mass, everybody would be flying this way and that way. That was the biggest. Of how they aren’t going to get this to go off and everybody keening cool and instead of going down the road here, everybody would like running all over everybody and wrecking trying to get out. That’s the biggest thing I told my wife. You know, what does happen, how are we going to get out? We might get hurt by everybody else trying to get out all at one time.

INT: Do you think that anything that happened at TMI might have affected your health? Either now or somewhere down the way?

NAR: No, I never really. . . It’s probably a possibility but something I never thought about and it’s nothing I’m going to sit around worrying what happened to me now I got this. I can’t figure. You got to end somewhere along the line, I probably never knew about before and . . . so it’s not anything that I’m going to worry about. I think about it but it’s not something I’m going to (unintelligible).

INT: Do you think there might be something else in your life or any other aspects that might have been affected or might be affected?

NAR: No, not that I know of.

INT: How about Carlisle? Do you think anything might change here?

NAR: If the thing would have melted I think things really would have changed but it all depends on how bad it was. But I don’t think the town has changed. Ever since that has happened I really have never heard too many people saying that I really got to get out of this area. Of course like I say we were far enough away. I never talked to anybody who lives near the area or something like that. I don’t think Carlisle has changed too much that I know of.

INT: If the worst had happened, the absolute worst whatever that is, what do you think might have happened? Just about anyway you want to look at it.

NAR: I think if the worst would have happened, like I say I would have been more you know how long would it been before I would get back to where I live. That was one thing that had me worried because things get contaminated like that and they takes years and

years and years before it is safe to move back in there and what I thought here it is you work all these years and suddenly you lost everything, how could you ever recover from it. What would you had done with this many people. You are talking about a highly populated area. That's probably the biggest thing.

INT: Did you have any ideas about your health if the worst had happened?

NAR: No. Not at the time.

INT: It was just getting back and rebuilding your life.

NAR: Yes.

INT: At the time were you worried about food that's grown down there or a lot of people talked about the milk? Did that worry you at all and think about it?

NAR: I gave it some thought but they kept telling us that the count was low enough. At least I hope they were telling us the truth anyhow. They kept saying that everything was low enough that it wouldn't affect us. But they didn't tell us that we couldn't buy no milk now.

INT: You didn't buy different kinds of milk?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you picture in your mind what the effects of radiation. I know you said that you couldn't come back, did you think of what the place would be like? Of what it would all look like down here?

NAR: I tried to figure out what it would have been but (unintelligible) probably just an isolated area. A few people here and there but it would have been like a deserted island I guess or something like that because people would be afraid to come back and so would I because of being exposed to it. I tried not to get real involved in it. I just really couldn't say what for shape things really would have been in.

INT: At the time did you think about your own death? Do you think about dying?

NAR: No.

INT: Or anybody else dying?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you think about it affecting your health? What crossed your mind if anything?

NAR: I talked about my children's health because I have a girl that, one's 12 and one's only 3 years old and of course they were saying about the children down there up to a certain age they wanted out of there and that's only the . . . I was really worried about them and I tried to keep them in during the day or as much as I could. I believe I worried more about them and their health than mine, if something happened to the children. If something would have happened I would get them out because they were still...

INT: But you thought you would survive and your family would survive?

NAR: Yeah. I really didn't think it was going to get...

INT: Do you know what if anything in particular made you think like that? Was it the distance or the fact that...?

NAR: I think it was the distance. They were saying about just that certain area they were going to move and of course the winds kept most to the east. If they would I been coming this way or something like this I would have thought even more serious but the winds all the time kept going down along the river and . . . I was worried more about my children more than myself, and my wife.

INT: Did you think about God during this incident? Did you think he figured in all this?

NAR: Some, to an extent. I didn't figure as far as Him saying He did this for a reason. I never really thought of it that way.

INT: Did you pray about it?

NAR: No, I didn't really pray about it, but I kept hoping that things or nobody gets hurt or asked to move out of the area. I know there are people who did have to move on account of they had infant children that were out for a week or something like that there. I thought to myself what would happen if we had to move for a week you know. What would happen.

INT: Did you think at the time that you had any kind of responsibilities? To your family, your job? Anything like that?

NAR: Yeah, I had the responsibility of the safety of my family first and then once I would have gotten them far enough away then I would have tried to figure out how I was going to get to work or what I would have done then.

INT: Did those responsibilities clash? Was there a problem between the two?

NAR: No. Not at that time weren't any problems. I didn't give it no real serious thought of how I was going to get. . . once you'd get moved out then I'd get a hold of somebody to find out how I was going to work or whether they would want us to work or something like that.

INT: Was your job here affected?

NAR: No.

INT: No more work than usual?

NAR: No. I work as putting in . . . I didn't do anything out of the ordinary.

INT: I'm just talking about the job here. Did you have things to do that you normally wouldn't have to do? Like you mentioned getting things together? Was that something you felt you had to do?

NAR: Yeah, I thought I'd at least have together rather than wait until something happened then I'd been running around looking for this and looking for that. I tried to, I didn't have everything all in one but I had an idea of what I wanted, some I idea of what I wanted to take and . . .

INT: How did that affect you and then how did it affect anyone around you? Did it make anyone worry that you were getting...

NAR: No. Actually my wife she is the one who wanted to get some stuff loaded in the car and she wanted to get all her jewelry and all her belongings. She said do you think we ought to put them in the car and I said no, we ought to just get an idea of what you want and in a matter of a short period of time we can load it in the car. That's about as far as it went.

INT: When you think about a situation like that, do you have any ideas of the best way to act or to behave?

NAR: The biggest thing I think just keeping your calm go ahead and not get like my neighbor, he, I talked to him on Friday night and he was three quarters scared. He was all worried. He said, boy, I'm getting out of here. That thing's gonna blow and this is gonna happen and I said. Oh man, he was at a some type of a rally up here at the College and they had somebody come in and tell them and he came home and he was all scared and carried on. They took off. I told my wife, I said you got to get a little bit alarmed, if you don't get alarmed there's something wrong with you, but not get radical about this thing and everybody just evacuate the area.

INT: Did you try to stay calm?

NAR: Yeah, I learned that through the phone company. If I let things get to me, then you just get . . . 10 times worse that way than if you just . . . give a little bit of thought to what you want to do and then go ahead and do it rather than ripping and tearing and taking off and then once you get there you find out you left this laying there and that or you forgot this and you forgot that.

INT: Was there anything about the situation, anything at all actually, that made it hard to stay calm?

NAR: That Saturday I say was probably the worst., because they had the people evacuating and things there on that Saturday, they really didn't know for sure what was going on so that day I kept closer track of the radio and the television and had to keep pretty close to what was going on so if something was going to happen at least I'd like to find out as soon as possible then I would have planned on getting out of there.

INT: At the time did the incident make you think about any past experiences that you've had or past events either in your life or in history?

NAR: Other than the floods. We had the floods. At the time I was high enough up that I didn't get flooded but I had a friend. The floods I guess in 72 and then in 75 I guess that was the only other times that I really got worried about a certain situation or something like that.

INT: Was this incident similar to that in any way?

NAR: Yeah, it was similar to it only I think the flood in 72 was worse as far as, well, actually I was involved in it because it we lost the . . . (unintelligible). . . and we had to go up there to get stuff out and we had trouble getting there and going to the actual situation where people were lost all their belongings and homes and stuff and that was . . . probably more upset over or worried about a situation than I was at this here one. I probably was scared when they said they were evacuating the area, but once I found out it

was just a certain area and what they were doing initial . . . (unintelligible) . . . I thought it was everyone, but I found out it was just the children and stuff like that.

INT: Was TMI more or less frightening when you think about it and were in a situation than a flood or storm or something like that?

NAR: I think TMI was more frightening, how many people were affected in a short period. It was something you couldn't . . . this radioactive might not be able to see it (unintelligible). . .this radioactive material could come and you really wouldn't know it for sure. That was probably more frightening. Something you can't see is more frightening than something you can say there it is but this here you didn't know if it was over or nor. (unintelligible)

INT: At the time did any TV shows or movies come to mind?

NAR: No.

INT: Books or stories?

NAR: Other than the National Geographic that just happened to come out on the same identical day.

INT: It came out when then Friday?

NAR: I got it on a Friday I guess and it had all these reactors you know and problems in it and what you face with these reactors and everything sort of figured with what was going on down there. It made it interesting that way reading.

INT: Did you find yourself talking about anything or any stories? The question is, any songs or anything?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any daydreams that you remember?

NAR: Not that I know of.

INT: Any dreams while you were sleeping?

NAR: Mm-mm.

INT: Did you have any trouble sleeping?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you notice any changes in the people around you during the incident? People you worked with. Or people who lived nearby?

NAR: Everybody was talking about it and the neighbors were out and they were talking about all this and that and everybody was trying to get their opinion on what they thought of the situation and how bad they thought it was and something like that. I say there were more people out because that was on everybody's mind what was going to happen.

INT: Do you think those changes were lasting? Do you think people are going to talk more about it?

NAR: Me, myself, since this thing has happened other than reading about it here and there some of the stuff that's going on with it, I haven't heard too many people come up

with it since they got the thing shut down. I haven't heard too many conversations about it., other than reading or a coffee break or lunch or something like that there.

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

NAR: No jokes only the T-shirts that I Survived TMI and people said I Survived Sky-Lab and you could keep going on forever. But how are you going to know you survived TMI. It might be something 20 years from now before you survived. I don't worry about it anyhow.

INT: Do you remember any of the jokes or stories, were there any stories from the floods?

NAR: Not that I can remember.

INT: Have you developed any sort of opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: Yeah, I still think we still need the nuclear reactors and nuclear energy because we get about 18% of our energy developed by nuclear power and we just can't up and shut down all the nuclear reactors and lose all this power without sacrificing something. So I say until they can come up with something that is gonna develop this energy I think we need them. It's dangerous I think they may have learned their lesson and not take everything for granted. In other words, just keep on top of them and keep them as safe as possible.

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

NAR: About the only thing we got left that's as far as power is coal and stuff like that. They say about this solar but that's too far away and we can't put into service today and it might not get into for the next ten years so . . . They gotta need the nuclear power until they come up with something else.