

August 29, 1979

Occupation: Director of Auxiliary Services

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

NARRATOR: I think I was downtown heading down to the lawyer's office working on my Dad's estate. Now I believe I was in the car when I first heard something come over the news on the radio. I believe that's right, but I'm not sure if that's right.

INT: That would have been one of the first days?

NAR: I can't remember what day it was.

INT: Did you think it was serious at first, when you first heard that?

NAR: Well, I thought there was, you know I said "Oh, oh. This has some potential." But not as serious at first as what, well I guess later we were all alerted to it.

INT: So you changed your opinion later as to the seriousness of it?

NAR: Well, not, well yeah. I think I just became more emphatic.

INT: Did you. Do you remember by any chance what station it was you were listening to? You really can't seem to remember anything?

NAR: It might have been WHP. I only listen to 2 stations, WHP and WHYL, WHP 90% of the time, so.

INT: It was probably that.

NAR: I don't listen to the radio that much anyway, but I just happened to have turned on that day, I think.

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

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you know how far away it was?

NAR: Not really.

INT: How did you know it was there?

NAR: Oh, I had. By word of mouth that I knew that there was a reactor there.

INT: When you first hear about the incident, what kind of things did you talk about or think about?

NAR: At first?

INT: Yes.

NAR: I don't think at first you gave it real serious thought as you did after a day or so. Of course I thought, "Oh boy, this has some potential." But I didn't delve into it much further than that, right at that point I don't believe.

INT: Did you think it was a crisis situation?

NAR: At first?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: No.

INT: Did you later believe that it was?

NAR: Well, it certainly was very crucial to the people in the immediate area as to what the potential was that could happen to them and I think you would have to say that it bordered on crisis, yes.

INT: Did you start to seek out further information after you first heard about it?

NAR: Well, of course I didn't have to seek out information because right then at that point all the information was coming up the switchboard, which I was responsible for and we were putting up the bulletins and of course it was just coming at you on mass and we got into the meetings upstairs with the President, you know, and of course the student body became more concerned as time went on, after learning the possible – what could happen. I don't think I sought out any information because I felt I was getting enough from many many different sources. We were staffing telephones around the, 24 hours day and night trying to. At that point, I guess I would be at that point, what you are talking about. Trying to calm down parents and people calling in and so forth around the clock. We even had operators stay all night. I don't know if you are aware of that, but we did.

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Does that answer your question?

INT: Ya. Did you, were you listening to the radio or watching TV or following newspaper or TV accounts?

NAR: Oh sure, oh sure. It would be only natural that you would continue to try to get as much information as possible, and sure at night I would watch the TV, watch the news broadcasts. But there were so many things that were contradictory. One person would say this and somebody else would say that and for a while it was hard to know what you were thinking and what you were believing as far as I was concerned. You got so many different stories from so many different t people all the time. Met Ed was saying one thing and the NRC was saying something else and the governor would come out with something else. It was a mixed up affair for a while, I thought.

INT: So you were following this stuff more than you normally would or?

NAR: Yes, I think yes I think you could say that. Normally I am a news hound anyway, I watch the news broadcasts in the evening when I come home and then I try to get the 10:00 channel 5 out of Washington and I felt some of the broadcasts coming out of Washington were built up more than some of the local broadcasts or the local feelings on the thing, but yes I would say probably watched a little more than I normally would.

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

NAR: Well. When you say media you are including newspapers, radio, television, the whole thing at once.

INT: Right.

NAR: Of course they were going to different people, getting different stories and I thought at one point they were trying to sensationalize a lot of it, more so than what it should be. I think I thought also that (unintelligible short phrase) maybe scaring some people. But maybe they were not in the long run. I'm not sure whether they were reporting exactly what they heard or building it up at the same time. There is no doubt about it, this was a very serious thing and it may be a lot of people at that point didn't realize the extent of it.

INT: Did, how about the government officials?

NAR: Throburg basically, the governor of the state, I think he made a sincere and he made good effort in the whole thing to try and do what was necessary as far as planning for the evacuation and keeping an even keel. I really think he went all out and did as much as he possibly could.

INT: How about federal government?

NAR: Well, I think the, I forget the gentleman's name now from the NRC that was the main cog in the wheel. What was his name?

INT: Harold Denton?

NAR: Yeah. I think in general he did a good job, too. And I have. I don't know if later findings proved that different than what he did, but I think overall he had a quieting influence on people to keep the panic down and that type of thing.

INT: How about Met Ed's handling of the incident?

NAR: I'm not too sure that they totally told the truth the whole way, but I'm not too sure that they were ever confronted with this type of thing before and they were, not new at it, but, it was a strange situation and, well, what do you do? All in all, I guess I'd have to say that Met Ed was pretty fair will all the news. I'm not too sure that the federal and the state government were in agreement with them all the time. As I said, there were contradictory stories from both sides coming out and I don't think that Met Ed deliberately lied, I think maybe it was a case that they didn't know some of the stuff, and they had to go feel their way along.

INT: Ok, good. Did you talk about the incident with friends or family?

NAR: Oh, ya, sure.

INT: What kinds of things did you discuss?

NAR: Friends called me from far away, my son called me from the Air Force Academy. "Dad, are you home?" "I thought you were evacuated, why aren't you out of there?"

INT: Where was he stationed?

NAR: Colorado. The Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. We talked to my wife's best friend, down in Norfolk. She called us and she says, "When are you leaving. Come on down here, you can stay with me a couple of weeks." "Why aren't you leaving?" Her impression from the Washington papers was that the whole area was like Hiroshima. That everything was radioactive and we shouldn't stay here and we should get out right away. When she read the newspapers she thought this. My other son, Mark, was down in Florida and he called. He wanted to know if there was, well what the story was. In fact, when he came up from Spring Break, he took a round about way up. He didn't want to go near the place. But, yes, we had friends and relatives call. They expressed their concern about what we were going to do. And of course when we told them that we were about 25 miles from the 20 mile area and that we were being considered as an evacuation site. Why, it calmed their thinking down a little bit. But they were under the impression that basically the whole of Central PA was under fallout and they should get out and things. Children would be born maimed and everything else. From what they read in the papers, then. That was the impression I got from their tone to us.

INT: Ok. Did you talk about things with people around here at the college, at work?

NAR: Oh, sure.

INT: What kinds of things did you discuss?

NAR: The possibility of evacuation. Basically, the conversation was of people that would be coming into the college and were to be declared an evacuation center. As you probably are aware, we'd gear up for the nursing home patients, and for firemen. And we made plans for cots and blankets and sheets and did inventories and that type of thing. A lot of that talk was our gearing up to take care of people that would be evacuated from that area. Of course, there was discussion along the lines of the potential if the thing did go, and which way would the wind blow, would we be on the right or wrong side of it, the whole bit!

INT: Ok. Did you think it would get any worse, or did you feel that it was serious all along?

NAR: I think, no, that after, it got more serious after. I became as it went along, I think I became a little more leery about the whole thing. But it's the same time, I never lost the confidence that it could be handled by the people at the, the people that were there and the engineers on the site, the people from the government that were involved with it. I just had the confidence that they would fix the problem. I'm not sure it's fixed yet, but... the potential for thing blowing off I thought would never come.

INT: Ok, good.

NAR: They were my thoughts from the beginning. But I knew it was more serious after we got into it than when I first anticipated it.

INT: How did you feel about other people's reactions to the incident, like your friends calling in from all over, that type of thing?

NAR: Well, I think the news media had something to do with that. I said there was some sensationalism in the whole thing.

INT: How about people here. Were they overreacting or underreacting or anything?

NAR: Well, you know. You think if a person packed up and left with his family, you say, oh boy, he's really overreacting. But yet, who am I to judge if a person is overreacting or underreacting? Each person has to evaluate their own family situation, their own sense of safety. What they felt they should do for the safety of their family. If I would have had three small children, 4, 5, and 6, and knew of the potential I might have thought differently than I would when my three boys were all off at college in another area. It was just my wife and myself, and we're old geezers anyway, ready to go under. How to (am I) evaluate a younger person with a family. And there was some of that. As you know. Who just packed up and literally left and got out of the area. Now, sure may people felt that this had the potential to be like Nagasaki or something like that. But, I don't think that it had that potential.

INT: Did you have visions of something like Hiroshima happening?

NAR: No.

INT: What were you imagining as the worst thing that could happen?

NAR: To tell you the truth, I don't think I ever really thought about what was the worse thing. All along they said that if the thing lost control or would blow there would be time enough for us to evacuate and head west.

INT: You say, if they lost control. Did you think at the time that they had control?

NAR: Well, there were different phases. At different times I thought they had more control than at other times. As I said, I had the confidence that they would lick the problem I think the whole way through. You become a little apprehensive hearing people talk and listening to the issues, and hearing the conversations of the people upstairs meetings. I think probably that some of Dr. Bank's talks had a calming influence on the student body. Maybe I agreed with him.

INT: Ok. Do you feel now that they are in control?

NAR: Not fully. We've still got a million tons of water of something to get rid of. They didn't know how to do it. Have they solved that yet?

INT: So that constitutes not in control yet?

NAR: That's right. Till they get rid of that and there's no problem that can hurt anybody, then I say we've still got a problem.

INT: Do you feel that there was anyone you were listening to more than others, trusted more than others?

NAR: Well, I think there was a tendency on my part to listen to our two physicists: Luetzelschwab and Priscilla. Being the training that they've had and the fact that John was right down there near it monitoring the situation, I had some faith in them.

INT: How about someone you mistrusted?

NAR: Did I mistrust anybody?

INT: Did you mistrust anyone?

NAR: No.

INT: There was nobody whose word you took with a grain of salt?

NAR: I'll listen to anybody and tend to evaluate them on my own. I don't think you could say that was mistrust. Maybe I didn't agree with some of the stuff some of the people said. But they may be hell bent on something that I'd be mediocre on the same thing. But I don't think that's a case of mistrust. It's a case of evaluating what they're saying.

INT: Did you find that during the situation you were worried?

NAR: I think that during the whole situation I was more worried what was going to happen at the college and the people within the college. The attitudes and where we should go. I had more worry about that aspect of it. Of course some of the worry would be if, getting parents to settle down and not accept everything they read in the papers. I think that this was one of the things. There were some misleading stories in the papers, newspapers. It was just terrible. I had people answering the phones upstairs and some of the things that came in, you wouldn't believe. I had one lady call me and I talked to this lady for a long time and she couldn't believe that the college hadn't evacuated and gotten everybody out of there immediately. Who am I to make a judgment, but I'm not too sure that had there been a problem that I would have rather been here than in Allentown – that's directly east of the place. And she never even thought about it, the possibility of what could occur with her and she's only 70 or 80 miles away.

INT: Ok. Did you make any plans other than what one would ordinarily make?

NAR: Just to work longer hours, and to try and make things better upstairs, that's all.

INT: So your job was affected?

NAR: Oh, yes. I had to see that the people who had responsibilities to the school and for the switchboard were there, I had to arrange that and also staff phones myself sometimes. Basically, just continue along with the job and see that the things were ready and fulfill the requests that were made of me by the top level administrators.

INT: Were you actively making plans to make the Union into an evacuation center?

NAR: Oh, sure.

INT: So, that you were in charge of that?

NAR: Well, the whole thing was basically following Barry Gall but he was discussing with me, well you know, inventory levels of sheets, and he wanted to check the food level at the food service. How long could we feed so many people for, how many days. How we could lay out the social hall upstairs for a nursing home patients that we had to put in here, men here and women there. It would have been a real problem believe me, if we had nursing home people come in here. Just the bathroom facilities alone to take care of, whether you would have had the nursing home staff to take care of them. So that's

why I was hoping that a lot of kids would stay around and would offer their services if it came to be. Fortunately, it didn't come.

INT: Did you ever think of leaving the area?

NAR: No. No plans to go anywhere and only if there had been a large evacuation would I have left. I would have headed south. And west.

INT: So was there anybody you were listening to for when you should leave or should you decide to leave?

NAR: I guess if it was kind of left up to me, but it was up to the discretion of the governor to declare the evacuation, and I probably would have abided by that. We wouldn't have been within the 20 mile area so we probably wouldn't have evacuated even then.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was going on?

NAR: What do you mean by mental picture? Down there, you mean?

INT: The way people were reacting or what they were doing. Or didn't you even think about it?

NAR: You think about the way, you think about what happened in Japan, at Hiroshima. But then you immediately say, well, that can't happen here, because it's impossible to have that type of situation. All you think of, you look at pictures, and in the newspapers that were taken at a distance (at TMI). I don't think I had any other than that. Outside of what was implanted there by the news media.

INT: You didn't visualize anything like Hiroshima, as your friends were, or did you? Did you think of that?

NAR: Well, you know the talk of Hiroshima would come up. You remembered the pictures; I remembered the pictures from WWII. That was before your time. But immediately I blanked that out because I just felt that was an impossibility.

INT: Ok. Do you think anything that happened at TMI affected your health or will in the future?

NAR: No. I can't get any worse than I am.

INT: Ok. Do you think any other aspects of the life has been affected?

NAR: No.

INT: How about in the community?

NAR: I think that maybe has somewhat of a positive effect from the viewpoint that the preparedness is better now. It possibly alerted us to the fact that we must be fully aware to go in the event of an emergency. There might be some better plans laid in the future and people would be more aware of what need to be done in the future. I think it had a positive effect in that viewpoint.

INT: If the worst thing had occurred, what do you think it might have been?

NAR: I'd have no idea. You didn't really think about it.

INT: Did you find yourself avoiding milk and/or food from the area?

NAR: No.

INT: You drank it anyway?

NAR: I don't drink milk anyways, except for my coffee but I didn't cut down on my intake of any food, no.

INT: Did you have any ideas of how radiation would affect the environment, just like around you?

NAR: Well, I didn't have the ideas that, I think I know more now than I did then. Till you are really confronted with it you don't think much about.

INT: Did you about your own death?

NAR: No.

INT: How about that of others?

NAR: No.

INT: You thought you would survive?

NAR: I thought that we had the ability to cope with it.

INT: Did you think of God during the incident?

NAR: No, not any more than I might do so normally.

INT: What religion are you?

NAR: Protestant.

INT: Are you practicing?

NAR: Sure.

INT: Did you go to a religious during the incident?

NAR: Just church normally.

INT: How was the attendance, was it different? Or was it normal?

NAR: The first Sunday I was working. The second Sunday I went. We were staffing the phones then, weren't we?

INT: Possibly.

NAR: I don't think I went. But I don't think there was much difference.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: Did I pray? No more than I would normally.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities during the incident toward the college as well as home?

NAR: Absolutely.

INT: Did you find any conflicts between the two?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you not do a lot of things that you would have normally done?

NAR: I was staying here staffing the phones and such. So I had less time. When I did go home, I would call in and see how things were going. Of course when we were getting ready for maybe being an evacuation center, why we had do (to) some preliminary work. Anticipating what the needs of these people would be. That was above and beyond the regular. In lieu of my regular work.

INT: So that was just something else to do?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did the plans that were made for the evacuation center or anything like that, did that become a part of Dickinson College? Is it now an official record?

NAR: I don't know. That's a good question.

INT: I was just curious. I was just wondering.

NAR: You'd have to ask Barry Gall about that, I'm not sure.

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

NAR: From what aspect do you mean?

INT: Meaning like a code of behavior or a particular way you should react?

NAR: Well, I felt that there was a matter of setting an example from the people who work under me and at the same time I think that we needed to approach this thing in a calm manner and not get overly excited and try (?liberal?) aspects of it. I would say that you had to keep your cool.

INT: Did the event bring to mind past experiences you may have had?

NAR: Like a so-called crisis.

INT: Yeah. Either something that happened to yourself or something that happened in history, you could.

NAR: Oh, the atomic bomb and Hiroshima. But as I said I ruled that out of my mind because I knew that this is nothing like that, but really. I guess I could say probably not.

INT: Did you mind that this incident was more frightening than a flood or a hurricane or war even?

NAR: No, I don't think I was too concerned about this as what I was in the 1972 flood when I had 6 feet of water in my basement and the water kept coming up and I didn't know when it was going to stop. And that was immediate and right on my own premises and it was something I had to cope with and couldn't do a darn thing about it and I was more concerned probably overall with that than with this. Because this was little further away even though it had some great potential. I don't think it has been the most frightening thing in my life. The most frightening thing in my life was laying under an artillery barrage for about 5 hours. And that's the most frightening thing, if that was your question.

INT: Did you that come to mind?

NAR: No.

INT: You didn't even thought of that. Had you read any books or stories or seen any television or movies that reminded you of this incident?

NAR: No.

INT: No, you didn't think of any of this stuff? Ok. Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: No. I have a monotone. My wife says I shouldn't sing.

INT: So you didn't sing. How about daydreaming or anything?

NAR: Not really.

INT: How about sleeping dreams? No?

NAR: I tossed and turned, but its not a result of that. I have done that all my life.

INT: So it didn't really disturb your sleep any more than normal?

NAR: No, it didn't.

INT: Did you notice any changes occurring to people around you?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: In what way?

NAR: Oh, becoming excited over this thing. Trying to make up their minds as to what to do. I think there were some people who were betwixt and between whether to get out or to stay. Sure, I noticed changes in people.

INT: Do you think they were lasting changes?

NAR: No, I think they were changes that were spurred on by the incident itself. And they were at the point where, "Do I need to make the decision to leave?" We had people leave the college and some stayed. We had some students who went home and some stayed. Of course I know one girl that lived in Camp Hill. She said I'm not going to Camp Hill, that's worse than here. So, you know. As I said, it is all up to the individual in their own mind. And there is no way I can evaluate whether they are right or wrong. But I did notice change.

INT: Did it change yourself?

NAR: I don't think so.

INT: Not at all.

NAR: I'm too old to change.

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

NAR: Oh yeah. All kinds.

INT: Can you remember any?

NAR: I'm not a good joke rememberer. But there were all these things going around, you know. I just. Off hand I can't come up with any. There were a lot of them.

INT: Do you remember if people thought they were funny?

NAR: Well, I think that after the incident was pretty well calmed down, then the joke, you know, then there was more levity to them than before. If you know what I mean.

INT: Yeah.

NAR: You kind of got, kind of got a hold of yourself a little bit then you could more or less joke about it a little more.

INT: Did you think they were funny?

NAR: I think I was probably the same way at first. Jokesters. It disturbed me. I'll tell you. It disturbed me a little bit at first on the t-shirt thing.

INT: Did it?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: In what way?

NAR: Well, I just thought here was a serious situation and these people were making jokes that over, over it. And later I accepted it but. But, oh. Things like "I survived Three Mile Island." Afterwards fine but the first one that came out, it disturbed me a little bit. That we were making a joke of it, but then I accepted it, I guess.

INT: Why do you think people were making jokes?

NAR: I don't know. Maybe. I'm not sure. Whether they were trying to do it in an effort to calm themselves. I don't know. You'd have to ask a psychologist about that.

INT: Did you find your opinions about nuclear energy changing or did you form an opinion during this period?

NAR: No, I don't think my opinion on nuclear energy has changed then or now.

INT: Have you formed an opinion at all?

NAR: I think we need nuclear energy in some form, but its going to be in a form that has absolute control. Whether that could be found or not I, I'm not sure. But or else we have to develop some other energy source and we don't seem to be doing on it. Its strange to me that we can put a man on the moon and we can't find enough energy for this country. But I, at the moment I don't seen any other way to go. That nuclear energy. Unless we can come up with something else and I would be all for it if we could.

INT: I just thought of something. You were saying about the flood, did you find people joking about that?

NAR: Yes, I guess I had the same situation there as I did here. People would joke about, oh in fact now that I think about it I joked about it. I lost a pool table and I, you know I would be kidding people I would sell them a good pool table for little or nothing. Yeah, I think it was kind of the same situation.

INT: Why do you think you did that?

NAR: Why I did?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Well, I guess maybe it was just a, me saying, "Oh the hell with it. Its over and done with. I might as well make the best of it."

INT: Uh huh.

NAR: "If possible."

INT: Well, that's pretty much all I have to say. Can you think of anything that I have forgotten or would you like to say anything else?

NAR: Only 35 minutes.

INT: Oh, is that all. Ok.

NAR: That's a long pen.

INT: Yeah.

NAR: I, no not really Anna. Unless there's, you know I. How long is it going to take you to write this book?

INT: Oh, I don't know. I'm not writing it.