

Date: August 17, 1979

Occupation: Student

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

NARRATOR: After the night of that incident, the morning when I went to the Physics class, the first thing our teacher said is that there was a nuclear accident. And about halfway through our class, Professor Wolf who is doing all kinds of research in plasma Physics in our Physics department, he came running into class and told that they had another explosion in the TMI plant. And we were sort of discussing about it in the class then for some time.

INT: Who was the Professor?

NAR: Professor Howard C. Long.

INT: Did you know that TMI existed before this occurred?

NAR: We went.... Well, last year, all the Physics students in my class went down to visit TMI. As a matter of fact, we were really proud that we went down there. That was only a couple of months before the accident. But I couldn't go at the time, because I was told that I might have some trouble with my passport since I'm a foreign national. Because they were going on an official tour and there were things which are supposed to be secret.

INT: Did you have a pretty good idea how far TMI was from where we are?

NAR: Yeah. Because only a couple of weeks before that there was a picnic, a physics picnic, in Professor Luetzelschwab's house, which is right across the river and we were just watching the whole thing. And we knew each and everything about the location of TMI.

INT: When you first heard about the incident, what kind of things did you start thinking about? Did you think it was serious?

NAR: Well, being a Physics major, right from the beginning I knew it's nothing... I mean not nothing, that's not the right word, I mean nothing is going to blow up. See the first two days, the whole thing people was thinking was "Is it going to blow up?" And there wasn't any chance of blowing up. It was a question of how bad it's going to get. I mean, if there was a meltdown, then the whole river all the way down to the ocean would have been contaminated and things like that. So I was, at no point I was scared. But that's all I can say. So, my reaction was like I knew definitely it's going to be one of the biggest lessons that this thing is going to teach. But at no point, I was scared or afraid.

INT: After this happened did you try to find out more information on actually what occurred?

NAR: Yeah, after the second day, I got involved. Because when everybody started to leave from campus, the school closed down. And in the physics department in our college, we made up a group and we were working round the clock. And especially me, I was assigned the job of reporting the radiation level here in Carlisle to all the radio stations in Carlisle every hour. So, I was taking the radioactive reading at the basement of the physics building every hour and calling up the three radio stations in Carlisle, telling them how the radiation level is. The other thing we were doing at the same time was we went to three different places within a half mile radius of TMI and took soil sample from there and brought it up to here. And we have a multi-channel analyzer here at physics department which is...See in general radioactive detectors, you can just detect the presence of the radioactivity, but in multi-channel analyzer, you can detect how much energy peak is. From the energy peak in the graph, you can detect what kind of particle and what kind of radioactive stuff is coming out. So it's just like analyzes the whole thing. What kind of stuff is coming out.

INT: Did you talk about some of these things with your friends and some of the other students you work with?

NAR: Well, yeah. As a matter of fact that was the whole topic. At night we probably when our free time, we had shifts, like I'll work from this hour to this hour. Usually I used to work in the daytime. And we even did a couple of things like at two o'clock in the morning, because each analyzer, I mean each soil sample takes six hours to be analyzed by the multi-channel analyzer. So once we put that down, we have the list in the physics department who's going to come next after six hours and put the second sample in. Things like that. So we were kind of running 24 hours a day.

INT: Did you get in touch with your parents or your family?

NAR: On Saturday, I can't remember what date it was. By that time they heard about it, and you know in the outside world it was flashed real bad problem. Especially in a country like Bangladesh. So my parents called up and right at that time I was working at the basement and somebody, there were only a couple of guys left on my floor and he say, "Well, he's not here right now." And I was told later on. Even that guy, even that guy didn't tell me that my parents called. The next week I got a letter that we called you and you were not there and things like that. Then I was really worried. Then I got the telegram, then I send them another telegram and answer. I told them I am alright, Carlisle is out of dangerous zone and things like that.

INT: Did they hear it on television or radio? How did they hear about it?

NAR: Well, my Dad listens to (?Wasser Memerick?) every night at 10:00 Bangladesh time. So what's happening in USA my Dad knows it right away, on that day. So I would say the day the accident happened, the next morning my Dad knew about it.

INT: First you didn't really think it was a very serious situation. Did you ever, did your ideas change about it? Did you ever think it was serious?

NAR: No, not only first, at no point I mean. As a matter of fact to tell you the truth, probably this is because I am extremely pro-nuclear energy. I mean, what am I supposed to say? I am in favor of nuclear energy and I think that's one of the, not better ways, one of the biggest solutions of nuclear, energy in the coming years. So right at the beginning I knew of the difference between the American Nuclear System, I mean nuclear system and the European system and how irresponsible people are becoming gradually since it is working so easily and nothing is happening. So the first thing that clicked into my mind is that this is going to definitely a big lesson to all these nuclear power plants in this country.

LH: So considering your background that you know pretty much about the nuclear efforts and have established your own ideas about it, how do you feel about some of the other people, their reactions about the way?

NAR: As far as Dickinson College, I would say students just found a change to go home so they just took off. And the rest of the people, their parents were so scared because of the news media, the way they were flashing on the news, they started to call up their kids here in the college and, or rather ordered them to go home (unintelligible phrase). Other than that, in town people, I don't think they knew pretty much what was happening. They were just kind of, like "Hey, something is happening." That kind of, as if, well. It's like this. When you don't know much about something, what's happening. You just listen to what other people are saying and everybody was. Suppose somebody say "Hey it is going to blow up in one hour!" A hundred people will in that area will start to scream and yell, that sort of thing. So a lot of people will panic.

LH: Did you follow a lot of the news reports and TV and the newspapers and on the radio? Trying to keep up to date with what was coming?

NAR: I would say, as far as the governor's speech goes and things like that, very important. Other than that, I didn't really follow much TV because I knew exactly what was going on right in our doorstep because we were taking radiation count each and every moment and if anything goes wrong we would like know it in a split of a second.

LH: Did you find yourself paying more attention to the news or the media than you usually do?

NAR: Yes, definitely I did because I had. Because of a couple of reasons. I am involved in that thing. Secondly I didn't have much reading to do and things like that. So I was watching really.

LH: Well, knowing what you did from the information you were getting and from what you were hearing from the media, how do you think the media covered it?

NAR: I said there were times when they went a little bit too much and the next thing I know, I mean after they did something bad, they tried to cover it up by doing just the opposite in the next couple of days. So there were times when I was just laughing and cracking up, the way they were doing things. Like NBC would report something like, as if something bad is going to happen and like probably a million people will call NBC and say what's happening, so they will try to cover it up next couple of hours by saying better things like making it lighter. But the radio pretty much covered it good and not too bad.

INT: How do you think the government officials handled the incident?

NAR: One thing I was really surprised is the time the all the equipments and personals who was supposed to work in that thing, too. And to decide who was going to handle the situation I really don't know much about the difference between all this what do you call it, Energy Commission and Interior Department and things like that. They took like two days just to decide it is up to who to take care of this stuff. That kind of thing I think they should have moved faster than the way they handled the situation.

INT: How about the way MET ED handled the situation, what do you think? If anything.

NAR: From the business point of view they tried their best to, and the situation other than that I would say they probably, probably would try to make, just to make it a little lighter than what the seriousness of the whole thing was.

INT: When you did turn to other sources for more information who did you find maybe more reliable than some other sources? Who did you put most of your trust in outside sources? Or was there anyone?

NAR: As a matter of fact I can't really name a single source that I can mention. I'd say from the soil sample analysis that we were doing there wasn't really anytime at which point we saw that the radiation level was going big. There were things that we were noticing like abnormal energy peaks, like different kind of radiation that you cannot find in a normal soil. Things like that, and I was pretty much convinced that probably, unless there was a meltdown or something, this was going to be just like this.

INT: Was there anybody that your really mistrusted or you really didn't like the approach they were taking or?

JK: Not really, not really.

INT: Did you think that the people who were in charge of the incident down there were in control of what they were doing? They know what they were doing? They had everything under control?

JK: The initial, initially it took some time, but later on when they started to get really involved. I mean when everybody started to talk about it and all the government, and

everybody was involved then they started to do pretty good work. But at the initial moments I would say it was up to only a couple, not ignorant, less efficient people to take care of that thing.

INT: Did you think that at the time, or is that just looking back at it now?

JK: I'd say if you had asked me the question the next morning I couldn't have answered you, that somebody was doing that. But right now I can see what was happening. There should have been. Well, you can really say that there should have been more experienced personnel because that's a question of money and things like that. But I'd say they were, overall, all throughout the country since all these things were working well in the nuclear plants, they were kind of getting a little bit. What do you call it, careless, uncaredful.

INT: Are they, do you think they are in control at this point, right now?

JK: Pretty much, yes, pretty much.

INT: So I sort of gather from talking to you, you never were really worried about the situation?

JK: Not really, personally no.

INT: What, was there anything you saw as a possibility of bother you the most? Anything that, what was the biggest fear that you had?

JK: I would say. The biggest fear that I had?

INT: Yes.

JK: How many days do you have to stay more than normal time in school. That was the biggest fear I had, because I knew. Oh God, if the students stay home more than 2 week or 1 week then the college would definitely be extending finals. That means I have to stay here more. And that was the biggest thing I was thinking about. Even if there was a meltdown there was no way I was getting out of Carlisle. I would probably have taken care of people at the college, who would have come to the college.

INT: Did you make any plans along these lines at all?

NAR: Yes, there was at one. At one point I went to the Student Services and told them, yeah, that if there is any problem in case of evacuation, I would be here, just give me a call.

INT: Did you change any of your ordinary day to day routines? Anything?

NAR: Other than partying every night, no. Not really. No studying, OK. Pretty much I spent the whole day almost in the physics building. Either taking reading or just reading around in the physics lab or things like that.

INT: What did you think about the possibility of having to leave the area? What would you think about leaving the area?

NAR: Well, even if there was a meltdown I don't think Carlisle was within that limit of evacuation, so even if everybody had left I would have stayed here. Yes, definitely, I can say that.

INT: Why would you stay?

NAR: Because I know it was not really that bad. I mean in case of a meltdown it is not an explosion. I mean. The other thing we were doing at that time which Prof. Kenneth Laws was doing basically. We were studying how, if there is a mass air borne radioactive thing coming off. We were studying the weather system, following the weather system at that time and trying to find out how people; here in Carlisle area are going to be affected. And we found at that time the wind was from South to North, so we were like out of the wind range. Wind, what do you call it, direction or something.

INT: Was there anybody that you were involved with that maybe you looked for to give you the sign to go? Was there anybody like, that you were watching to help you make up, to help you make up your mind whether you were going to stay or leave?

NAR: Yeah. I would say if Prof. Luschelswab told me to leave I would have left the place. More or less because he is the nuclear physics professor here at Dickinson so we were following more or less his guideline.

INT: Could you picture in your mind at all any of the events that might have been taking place at the actual reactor site? Any mental images of what might be going on down there?

NAR: Not inside on the. I can't remember the day. During those soil pick up times I went down there twice and we were stand, we stood right across the river for awhile and we were just watching and we saw helicopters and things like that, just coming down and up and all kinds of people working all around.

INT: Did you have any kind of ideas of what might be going on in there?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: The type of things they might be doing?

NAR: Yeah, yeah. The, gee the whole chamber was. Oh, you mean how I reacted?

INT: No, what did you think was going on in there? How?

NAR: You see the temperature was going out of control and they tried to just cool it down. It was a question of how, not. The whole system was stopped, but it was a question of how to take it down. That was the biggest technical thing and down on the other end of the country they were making a models like TMI and studying how to take those gas bubbles size down. They were doing different kinds of experiments.

INT: Do you think your health was affected in anyway?

NAR: My health? No.

INT: Not even in the future? You don't think there will be after effects?

NAR: In my life I think there might be a time when I will be exposed to much more radiation than this. A couple of times more because.

INT: But this incident, you don't think affected you?

NAR: No. Not here in Carlisle.

INT: Do you think any other aspects of your life have been changed at all or things around your community?

NAR: Yeah. Now I'll be more energy conscious and while right my, before coming to college my idea was. I mean still now after I graduate and finish my graduate school I will be working basically with the energy field and so nuclear energy will be there also and now I am kind of more interested in nuclear energy after this incident.

INT: Since you did know pretty much what was going on down there and were monitoring the situation pretty well, what do you think the worst thing that could happen would have been?

NAR: Technically so far I know and the way Prof. Luschelswab was explaining to us there wasn't any chance of explosion. The only thing that could have happened is if the temperature went out of control, I mean the limit, there could have been a meltdown at the core, the entire core, the nuclear core. And that could have been a bad situation because the whole radioactive stuff would have just come out of the thing and just go through the river and (unintelligible).

INT: How do you think this would have affected some of the aspects of your life had (unintelligible)?

NAR: The whole probably, probably the whole area side. The whole river all the way down to the ocean could have been (unintelligible) forever and just destroy all the trees and fish in that river and then all the, well, cattles – I mean cows – and all kinds of stuff.

They have, probably have to kill all of them and probably find. Just trace down the whole zone where this radioactive mess could have gone then.

INT: Do you think Carlisle would have been affected?

NAR: If there was a meltdown, not immediately but in the long run I would imagine yes. In the long run probably.

INT: Do you have any problems with the, do you have any concerns about the food and some of the milk coming out of that area?

NAR: No, not really. Personally, not really.

INT: It doesn't bother you at all?

NAR: No. I never even thought of it. Not at that time even. But I was told even, at one point if I can remember right we were told not to drink fresh milk. But I was drinking it. I never even thought of it.

INT: You were saying if the worst had occurred and a meltdown occurred that you were thinking of things like of cattle being contaminated and things like that. Did you have any images of the effect radiation would have on the environment and other than cattle. How about trees and things like? Would they have been affected?

NAR: Well, I mean physically you won't see anything.

INT: Right.

NAR: I mean, it's nuclear energy. Nuclear radiation is something like really different you can't. It's not like shooting your head off. It's like, like. You won't see anything, but in the long run depending on the nature of the radioactive stuff it can be very bad. It might be more direct. I'd say in this case it would have been a moderate long term situation. Like the whole area, the whole zone, this zone surrounding, all the way down and probably where we'll gather study for the next couple of generations.

INT: Did you think anything about your own death at the time?

NAR: I just couldn't see.

INT: Or the death of others or?

NAR: No. Even if there was an explosion in the nuclear plant? There was not question of a death.

INT: So you, based on your own assumption gather and your own information you were always assured that there wouldn't be any problem.

NAR: No, no.

INT: Did you ever, did you think about God at all during the incident or did you think how he might have a play in this. I mean a role in this?

NAR: Well, personally no. But my mother was telling me that the worst snow storm is in your place, the nuclear accident is in your place. What is going on?

INT: The what?

NAR: Do you remember how badly, I think Pennsylvania was one of the states.

INT: In what?

NAR: The snow.

INT: Oh, the snow.

NAR: Wasn't it one of the worse in fact that there is. Not last year, in my freshman year, that was 1978.

INT: Did you, so you didn't really. Did you pray at all during the whole time?

NAR: No.

INT: Does your religion say anything about God wrecking revenge on mankind or?

NAR: No, not really. Not, no.

INT: Let me ask you something, Kazi, what didn't you pray about?

NAR: Uhhh.

INT: No, I'm just kidding you.

INT: Do you think you have any responsibilities? Do you think you personally had any responsibilities during the incident.

NAR: Yeah, every hour. I mean other than doing our job there, the only other thing I was worried about if there is a meltdown or if the situation goes worse what would be my role and other things like what am I supposed to do, who am I supposed to contact and things like that.

INT: You don't really have any occupation other than student at this point?

NAR: Other than working.

INT: And working food service.

NAR: And for security and drinking beer and, what else, working TA'ing Organic and TA'ing physics.

INT: did you end up working more, like in any job, like food service?

NAR: Yeah, since I had more free time, yeah, I was. See, I think food service was closed for a day. No, it was open all the time, yeah. At one time I was like, you know, sort of working food service, then we used to take 15 minutes off, run out to the physics building, take the radiation count and report it to the radio, come back and work food service more, stuff like that. I was working.

INT: And the, but school work went out the window?

NAR: Yeah. I didn't do a single page of reading. Just forget about it.

INT: Basically these are things that you had to do, that you normally wouldn't have had to done? It was just working more hours?

NAR: OK. Yes.

INT: Did you have any ideas about how a person really should behave in a situation like that? Any code of behavior?

NAR: I, the only thing I can think of is they should have been more strict. I mean not strict. The language should have been more rude, all throughout the time. Like either you say that "Hey people, be reading for leaving the places" or "Don't worry about it." Don't just babble. I mean they were saying things like "At this point we suggest, too lazy to leave" and things like that. I just couldn't see the idea of doing that kind of thing. Either you say that "Hey, everybody be ready within 5 miles to leave the place within 3 hours notice or something" or say "Don't worry about it. We have taken care of it and no problem." And tell the whole fact. I mean, be tough. But they were kind of, you know trying to explain. It was just kind of a hide and seek game.

INT: You really didn't know which side to take?

NAR: Yeah. And I just couldn't see the point of playing that hide and seek game. It's just. Something happened, you take care of it, the people have to be informed. Inform the people. That was my attitude.

INT: Did you see the incident as being similar to anything that happened, ever happened to you before?

NAR: Well, in Bangladesh before I came here. Of course at that time the nuclear plant wasn't in operation. I have one nuclear energy plant about 60 miles from my home. Some terrorist group blew up the control center of the nuclear plant. Of course the plant wasn't running at that time so nothing could have gone wrong, but that kind of thing. Other than that I have seen war, probably being one of the worst wars in history. I have seen electric power plants getting blown off right in front of my eyes. Just the entire thing blew up with dynamites.

INT: Did you start thinking of that during this incident?

NAR: No, not during this incident.

INT: You didn't draw any parallels to?

NAR: No, not really.

INT: So you saw this whole thing as less frightening than that?

NAR: Yeah, although it doesn't sound right, but to be honest, yeah. I just took it very light.

INT: You were more frightened during the wars and the blowing up at home?

NAR: Well, not frightened. It was a question of survival. You can be shot any moment of the day. You have to be ready for death and that's a total different situation. Over here it is not a question of gone in a war.

INT: Do you think anything like this has ever happened before in history?

NAR: Due to the nature of this incident, just because it's related with the word nuclear it got a lot of attention but I would say every day of life there are thousands of incidents which even worse than this. Every day, all around the country, all around the world. This is just because nuclear, which is something you can't see and it comes. Especially after those second world war bombing in Japan by the US force. The story reminds of how people die and things like that. Although it's, I'd say the level of scarcity was not that high. But still it got more attention than any other incident. But there are lots of bad incidents happening all over the world. Like if there is a ship out wrecked somewhere. That's worse as anything.

INT: Did any TV shows or movies or anything you might have seen come to mind at all?

NAR: I really didn't see that movie. What's the name? "China Syndrome" or something like that? If I had seen that then I could have told.

INT: What made you think of that?

NAR: Because I was told by a lot of people that it is very similar to that thing. I mean, wasn't there something like. There was supposed to be a meltdown or a explosion in a nuclear plant and how people reacted and things like. Which is very similar to the TMI accident. So I. There were times when I was thinking I should probably see the movie.

INT: Was there any kind of song that came to your mind at all?

NAR: No.

INT: Songs or books?

NAR: No.

INT: Nothing similar to this?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any day dreams about what might be happening down there or?

NAR: To tell you the truth the only thing I was worried about was how many days I would have to stay at Dickinson rather than getting off for the summer. That was the only thing I was worried about that "Oh God is something goes wrong that meant 7 more days. If something goes even worse that means 15 more days."

INT: Did you have any dreams at night about things that were? TMI?

NAR: No.

INT: Did it disturb your sleep at all?

NAR: No.

INT: What was some major changes you might have seen, if you saw any, to some of the people around you during the incident?

NAR: Well, the best one and the worst one. The best one was we got 2 more physics majors right after the TMI accident. People became more interested in Physics. We had visitors everyday in the Physics building coming just to see how the nuclear physics lab is and plasma physics lab. And I can't even remember a time when even people – at Dickinson. I don't think there is probably more than 75 % of the people doesn't know what we have at the basement of the physics building. We tot the beautiful, probably one of the best at the honor graduate level in the country, plasma physics lab and some nuclear physics instrument and all kinds of thing.

INT: Do you think it changed some of these people in any lasting way, some of these people who all of sudden got this sudden interest. Do you think it changed them in a lasting way? Or yourself?

NAR: As for here at Dickinson or over all?

INT: Overall.

NAR: I suppose the nuclear energy goals. Its future will be. In one way it will be brighter because people will be more careful. In another way it's darker because Mr. Carter, the President, he didn't even mention the word nuclear in his national energy speech and I was surprised like anything when he did that thing, that kind of thing. That just because of one incident and he even couldn't, I mean he wasn't strong enough to mention the word. That kind of thing, that's really a pain. Or rather not a pain, I mean I am really sorry to see a thing like that happening but that's definitely. Nuclear energy is definitely one of the solutions of the 21st century.

INT: You were saying you saw some negative aspects as well? What kind of negative things?

NAR: That is the negative aspect.

INT: Just in Carter or people around here?

NAR: People around here like, although everybody knows about this energy crisis and instead of looking at nuclear energy as one of the solutions also people just started to think of it as a killing weapon. As if people's attitude I think was as if "oh, nuclear energy. Don't count on that. Just forget about it. Think of solar energy and coal and all kinds of stuff. And nuclear energy just forget about it." So from that point of view it was bad.

INT: So the changes in the people were that they went from either liking nuclear energy or not really caring one way or the other to actively against it?

NAR: Basically, yeah. And the funds – I mean common people.

INT: Did you hear a lot of jokes or posters about TMI?

NAR: Yeah, right here at Dickinson we were making thousands of T shirts, all kinds of T shirts.

INT: Do you remember any, some of the slogans that might have appeared on those shirts?

NAR: "I survived TMI" and "I'm Radiated." The one that I was thinking was. Well, on the second day when we were analyzing. No, not the second day. The day when the TV

people came at the, in our physics lab, we were trying to think of some lines and came at the, in our physics lab, we were trying to think of some lines and there was one that I made up was, "Caution. I am Radioactive." Things like that. That was the one I was thinking that if I can make one that would be nice. But there were other things like, you know, Going to Harrisburg, was the other thing. I survived Three Mile Island. I am Radiated. Radiation, TMI. Oh, there was one. Everybody. The one that Phi Delt brothers made up was, I can't remember what it said. It said something "if you were so scared about the bomb and now everybody talks about it" or something like that.

INT: Do you remember any other jokes that they did?

NAR: Not really. I'd say that the student level, especially at Dickinson, people who were staying here did pretty much knew what was happening so. They were not liking it in what do you call it. Not staged like, you know, like mature, the level where they do not make jokes like that. Probably in common people there were. People were making jokes.

INT: When people were telling the jokes, did others think they were funny? That were listening to them?

NAR: Right before the summer I would say that I really didn't have much contact with the town or rather Carlisle here. So I am not really sure of the living condition and the way people behaved and things like. Now I know how it is because I go to town everyday and look around what's going on, how people live and their behavior. I study their behavior, look at them. And sometime I find them very silly and sometime I find them strange, sometime I find them very interesting. Things like that.

INT: Did you find the jokes funny?

NAR: I didn't really hear a lot, frankly.

INT: The ones you heard did you like? Or did you just find?

NAR: By the time I was in touch with town there wasn't any joke left. People kind of forgot about TMI>

INT: What about joking on campus? Like the T shirts, did you think some of them were funny? Interesting even.

NAR: Yes, some of them were very interesting. Some of them were creative, different.

INT: What do you think were some of the reasons for these new slogans and jokes that were going around? Whose behind it?

NAR: Business.

INT: Business?

NAR: Making some money.

INT: How about on campus, the joking that was going on campus? Why do you think people were doing that?

NAR: Basically they have nothing else to do, just stew around and since, you know, they have now something interesting going on so they thought it might be a nice idea to make some T shirts.

INT: When you were saying that you have experienced war in Bangladesh, did you hear any kind of joking going on at that time? Did people joke about?

NAR: There were millions. I mean, not only jokes. Starting from, we just made up. I mean they might some joke, but there were practical things like the Y President, the then President of Pakistan ordered the army to crack down because he had a dark face, he had a dark scar on his face. All kinds of fooly things.

INT: What does that mean?

NAR: Like he hated other people so much, but right after the war when he's cracked up and been going to people on one side of his face started to become dark because as if it being while the people are getting kill, dying and crying for his death and things like that and its really showing up on his face. And he is.

INT: And so in other words people's wishes for his death are showing up on his face?

NAR: On his face and things like that.

INT: Why do you think people were saying that?

NAR: Because we just wanted to kill him. Because he just ordered hi army to kill all the people in the country and what can you wish for a person like that who gives an order like that.

INT: That was kind of your frustrations because you couldn't kill him you were letting it out then?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Have you developed any kind of opinion on nuclear energy? Different from what it was before or is it still the same?

NAR: Actually its more still the same. And there are other things, like that I'm really in a stage right now. I just, at the junior level it is not really time for you to start thinking

about different perspectives of nuclear energy. But the things that I have, just being a physics major was like how much more efficient you can make the nuclear energy. Right now its nuclear power plants are one of the lowest, lower efficiencies of energy systems. I kind of wonder at all the time. Not all the time, some time. That how can you get more efficient.

INT: Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to say or that we may have forgotten?

NAR: I'd say the only thing other than that part of, good part of TMI I can think of is, it was a very good experience for people who were here at that time. Especially people who were working in physics department. IT was very, very interesting experience for us. That we were practically dealing with something and there were times when I was feeling really good about it. That wow, look at that. We do all kinds of. We do exactly the same thing, exactly the same thing – you know a multi check analyzer, you know, a nuclear physics lab. And we did it for real. And I was really lucky that I was in a position like that to do anything like that.

INT: It is good to see some of these theories work out in real life?

NAR: Yeah, in practical real life. I mean it wasn't a joke, it was a real accident and we were doing it.

INT: You didn't have anything to do with setting that up did you?

NAR: Definitely not. (Laughing) Well, probably yeah. In my mind, my dreams.

INT: Mentally you did. Now that you know what you have said, are you willing to give us permission to use the information to publish the material?

NAR: I don't see anything wrong with that.

INT: And your name, too?

NAR: Javed, Kazi Javed.

(End of Interview with Javed....Interview with Michael Kline begins now.)

August 3, 1979

Interviewer: Anna Herrman
Informant: Michael Kline
Age: 39
Family Data: Self and child, 2 years
Ethnic Background: Jewish
Religion: Jewish, non practicing
Occupation: College teacher
Education: PhD
Dickinson Faculty

INT: When did you first hear about the Three Mile Island incident?

MK: The afternoon of the 28th of March.

INT: That was Friday?

MK: No, that was Wednesday.

INT: How did you hear about it?

MK: A neighbor came in and told me that he had been listening to the car radio and heard that there'd been an accident at Three Mile Island.

INT: What did you first think about it?

MK: My first reaction was not particularly worried. My first reaction was oh, there's been an accident. And listened to the news at that point in the evening and caught what they had been saying at that point.

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

MK: Yes.

INT: Did you know how far away Three Mile Island was?

MK: Only in approximate distances. I would have made it a little closer than it actually was, I think.

INT: Did you think it was a serious situation at first?

MK: No.

INT: Did that attitude change?

MK: Yes, very rapidly.

INT: What made your attitude change?

MK: Probably the thing that had the most bearing on my change of attitude was there seems to be the obvious....., that is to say the obvious lying on the part of the spokesman from the utility, obvious confusion on the part of the media, obvious bewilderment on the part of the political representatives. And this was even before the NRC got in on it. So melees began to grow at that point. Also the conflicting reports on just what happened and how much radiation had escaped.

INT: So you started to seek out further information about it?

MK: Yes.

INT: What kind of sources did you look at?

MK: Probably Wednesday night and early Thursday mostly the media. The radio, I suppose, radio bulletins.

INT: Do you remember which station you were listening to?

MK: WHP Harrisburg.

INT: Did you follow the news reports?

MK: I was teaching that day. My wife at home followed them. It was Thursday evening when we heard that there had been another release of radiation. And I think at that point, we had decided that we would probably leave the area then, except for the fact that, interestingly enough, the baby needed his bath and needed his supper. And by the time we got through all that, I think I was the one who decided that we should stay another night. My wife wanted to leave that night.

INT: Were you paying more attention to these sources, these newspaper sources and the media in general than you usually would?

MK: Yes. That is to say normally I would not listen to news bulletins during the day. I see the newspaper when I come home and maybe watch the TV news. So by listening to the radio and news bulletins during the day and not just for music, yes.

INT: That was different?

MK: Yes.

INT: What did you think of the handling of the situation by the media?

MK: I suppose they were doing the best they could under the circumstances. Even given for...I normally discount journalistic hyperbole and turns of phrases. I tend to

filter that out. So I wasn't particularly disturbed by the syntax or semantics of the news reporting, but I was I think disturbed by the fact that the media was not let in on what was going on. And I think it was this that led me to believe that the situation was much more serious than it was. I may be getting ahead of it a little bit, but I think that...I began to get the impression that the civil authorities did not want to panic the general population leading to massive traffic jams, accidents and injuries on the major arteries leaving the area. For that reason, they were giving out very sparse information.

INT: So that's the way you feel that the government officials were handling it, by trying not to panic the people?

MK: Yes, I think that. I was pretty sure they knew that it was very serious, but that they were putting a damper on it so as not to bring panic, because there was no way to evacuate the area appropriately.

INT: How about Met Ed? How do you think they were handling it?

MK: Abominably. They have a character, a vice-president by the name of Erblin or Herblin or something like that, who handled it very, very badly. It was obviously prefabricated. Prefabricated answers, I should say, that had nothing to do with the truth.

INT: Did you think that there was anyone that you particularly found reliable?

MK: I found, later on I suppose, Harold Denton had a kind of reassuring air. I felt at least at that point, and now I guess we're talking about Saturday, Sunday, Monday following that Wednesday, that his air was reassuring. He seemed to be trying to tell the truth about what was going, but it became obvious at that point, that they didn't know exactly what was going on. Something serious had happened and they weren't sure.

INT: Was there anyone that you particularly mistrusted?

MK: Well, I think that fellow from the utility became the immediate villain of this.

INT: How did you feel about other people's reactions to the incident?

MK: I felt that, in general, I feel that people who tend to respect authority, who have conservative religious views and conservative political views, tended to stay in the area and tended to minimize the situation. People who either are suspicious about authority or active, by that I mean people who have background in the anti-Vietnam protests of the '60's or this and that, people who distrust the media, people who had liberal or radical political views, not even radical, just say liberal political, tended to be very distrustful and many of them left. I think things broke down along those general lines. I guess it comes down to how one feels about it, generally believing authority or not believing authority. Now I also should mention that we have a friend who works at the state capitol, who works for a state legislator and by that time, we were beginning to get information from

him on how serious it really was. We were beginning to find out what an uproar the State Capitol really was in.

INT: What kinds of things did he tell you?

MK: That in spite of the reassurance statements coming out of the governor's office and lieutenant-governor's office, they were madder than hell because they weren't getting any information from the utility or the NRC. That in fact they were really right on the verge of going to an evacuation of, I think, a twenty mile area, which would have brought it right to Carlisle, except that again, they were afraid of panic. And they were afraid of...liability. And they were afraid of accidents and a little of this and that. So they kept it to the five mile area with pregnant women and small children. The fact that the lieutenant-governor had his pregnant wife evacuated to.....to.....Gap. things like that. The state legislator for whom our friend works has a background in science and engineering and nuclear engineering, as a matter of fact. He was down in the press room prompting the reporters on the kinds of questions they should be asking the lieutenant-governor. What was disquieting is that it became obvious then that the press didn't know what was going on and they didn't know how to approach the problem. They didn't know what to ask.

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

MK: No, I did not.

INT: What made you believe that?

MK: By the fact that answers to questions were divergent in their views. That they did not seem to be on top of what was going on, that within a half-hour block of interviews contradictory answers were heard frequently, that it seemed obvious in the demeanor and their rhetoric that they were trying to minimize something. Consequently, I think one was naturally distrustful.

INT: Do you feel now that they were in control at the time?

MK: No, absolutely not. I feel even more that they were not in control, especially in the aftermath, hindsight. The kinds of things that you read and the kinds of things that you learn through the various areas of your own life. Absolutely not.

INT: Do you think they are in control now?

MK: I think that control is a relative word. I think that the old type of control that we knew is no longer a typical word. For example, you used to talk about stabilizing the reactor and this and that. It's stabilized, but not in terms of the kind of stability that used to apply to a nuclear that was shut down for refueling or this or that. I think that there are a lot of problems ahead. I think that just lately when you read two days ago, this would have been about the first of August, that four thousands of water were dumped into the

Susquehanna without having any kinds of checks on them after the NRC made Met Ed promise that careful environmental controls would be applied to everything that went out. No, that doesn't imply control to me.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

MK: Yes. I think my wife was worried even more and I was worried on her behalf. I was worried for my family. I don't think I was worried for my personal safety. I was concerned for that. I was concerned for the future of the college too, considering that my life's work is here and that if an accident happened, Dickinson wouldn't exist. I was concerned in terms of a totally disaster, of a meltdown, I tried to think of what the area would look like. I think that people had a hard time visualizing what was going on, because they can't image 50,000 people dead and a half million dying a few days later. And you try to conjure up pictures of Hiroshima and Narasaki, but it wouldn't necessarily look like that. Or a concentration camp picture. I think that's one of the things that prevented people from understanding. They couldn't visualize thousands of bodies lying all over the place.

INT: Is that what you thought the worst would be?

MK: Is that what I think the worst would be? That would be the immediate worst, ya. In terms of a meltdown?

INT: Yes.

MK: You'd have an area that's completely contaminated. With thousands of people dying. Can you think of anything that's worse?

INT: No, I was just curious, because I thought that might be what you thought would be the worst.

MK: That's the immediate worst. I think that the long-term that exists, in terms of genetic changes. And who knows what would happen to the gene pool at that point. Plus a large area that would have to stay contaminated for years and years.

INT: Did you make any plans that you ordinarily wouldn't have done?

MK: Yes, we left Carlisle.

INT: Did you? Where did you go?

MK: We went to my in-laws out in Ohio, near Cincinnati which happens to be west, in the direction, it is the direction of the prevailing winds. And it's really our only stopping place. It's about 500 miles, but we went to it because that's a place to go.....

INT: How long were you gone?

MK: We were gone until... I was gone until Wednesday of the following week. So I guess I was gone a week. Well, we left Friday, so Friday till Wednesday. My wife and the baby stayed away a couple of weeks there with her mother.

INT: When you left did you start thinking of things that you should take with you? Or maybe that you wouldn't be coming back?

MK: Yes. My wife had been listening to the radio when she...she heard the radio report talking about the kinds of things to pack in case of an evacuation. At that point, everything that we had been surmising was one step ahead of the radio. In other words, by maximizing what they were minimizing, we were calling the shots. We would say this, but they're not saying it. And sure enough four hours later they would say it. Consequently, when she heard Civil Defense Authorities advising on the kinds of things to take, we felt that there would be an evacuation coming. I felt that if there was evacuation coming as far as Carlisle, I felt that if the accident were that serious, Carlisle would not be safe. I felt that the authorities were evacuating to the limit of Carlisle about 20 miles this way, and the limit to Lancaster and Lebanon in the East because otherwise they would have to go to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, which would have been the two centers to receive evacuees. And it would have been impossible to evacuate the population that far. So we felt that, consequently that because people were saying on the radio that this is what you should pack, we felt that an evacuation order was imminent and that even if people evacuated as far as Carlisle that still would not be a particularly safe place. So she packed some bags and left.

INT: What kinds of things did you take with you?

MK: Clothing.

INT: Just clothing?

MK: Yes, some small food items for the baby.

INT: You didn't think to take any kind of mementos or anything like that? or did you think you would be coming back?

MK: Yes. I did anyway. I don't know about my wife.

INT: Did you have anyone in your life that you were watching to determine when you should go or if you should go?

MK: I don't understand this.

INT: Was there any one person other than radio sources or that type of thing that you were watching which helped you determine when you should leave?

MK: My wife, primarily my wife. I think her state of mind really determined our leaving. She was very deeply affected by the whole thing.

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

MK: Mental pictures? No, I can't really say that I did. We had just seen the "China Syndrome" about five days before, so if anything I guess I conjured up a control room with a lot of people running around not knowing what was going on.

INT: Do you think that anything that happened there has affected your health? Or will in the future?

MK: I think probably not. I the reason I think not, is that from friends here in Carlisle who were monitoring the air and some of John Leutzelschwab's soil samples from over in Goldsboro, I guess not. I guess the amount of radiation probably wasn't that high. I understand the wind shifted and came through Carlisle and the radiation really went up at one point. I think we were gone by that point. I think not. I think one of the things that, however, I think that one of the things that bothers is the fact that the radiation gauges were off there....The needles were off their gauges at TMI. It's been found subsequently that they really did no have adequate monitoring equipment. And of course we don't know about low-level radiation. And so when I say I think not, it means exactly what it says. I guess not, but I'm not sure.

INT: You're hoping.

MK: Yes.

INT: Did you have any worries about food or milk from the area?

MK: When we got back here, we used powdered milk for awhile and then I guess about a month later, we went back to whole mill. But whole mile bought locally here in the local farms rather than from the Harrisburg side. You know, Allen Dairies and that kind of thing.

INT: You said that you were thinking of things that would be affected by the radiation. Did you have any ideas of the effect of the radiation on the environment just here?

MK: You mean here in Carlisle?

INT: Yes, here in Carlisle?

MK: Well, it's the kind of question...You can only answer that question by knowing how much radiation existed in Carlisle. And from what I can tell, from what I've been told, the amounts were minimal, amounts that were monitored here at the college.

INT: Did you think of your own death?

MK: no.

INT: How about that of your family?

MK: The safety of my family, yes.

INT: But you thought you would survive all this?

MK: I think so. I'm not sure that...I don't know whether my wife thought about dying or not. I keep mentioning her because maybe you'll ask me the question and I'll talk about that. I think her reaction was much more severe than mine. I can tell you this. AS we went west on the turnpike and I began to see the odometer click off miles farther from TMI, I think I felt a sort of great sigh of relief as we go to about 125-150 miles away from TMI. And I know that when we got out to western Ohio, it wasn't just the normal fatigue of the drive, but the day's tension – I just collapsed. I really was totally exhausted. Much more so than I normally am when I make that drive for a normal visit.

INT: So it was a lot of emotion?

MK: A lot of emotion, a lot of tension, yeah.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

MK: No.

INT: Did you pray at all?

MK: No.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities during the incident?

MK: Oh, yes. Primarily, responsibilities to my family and I think especially to the little one. Now I have two other children who don't live with them and I was quite worried about them. But they were about 65 or 70 miles away in Shippensburg, a little bit beyond that. My primary responsibilities were to my wife and my little one. I think we were particularly concerned about him because of everything that was being said about pre-school children.

INT: So you felt that you should get him out of here?

MK: Yes. I think had I been alone, just myself, I may not have gone. It was interesting that those couple of days, a Thursday and a Friday in particular of that week were very busy. I had a lot of meetings scheduled. I had one meeting in particular where people were sort of counting on me to fill in some information and bring some things to the meeting and then..... it's funny how you feel bad about letting your colleagues down and this and that. So as I say, had I been alone, I might have stuck it out.

INT: So it did affect your work to a certain degree, that you weren't here to?

MK: Well, in the sense that I had to cancel a couple of days of classes. As it turned out, I was able to make most of that up, because then classes were cancelled the following week, so it was only two days. And I think I had some work with me that I carried my briefcase home from the office and was able to do some work out in Ohio. So I don't think it affected my work too much, no.

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

MK: Calmly as possible. When we left the sun was shining and the birds were singing on our street and you had the feeling that maybe you should run up and down the block and knock on the neighbor's doors and say "Look, you've got to get out of here. There's a disaster that's imminent. We're leaving. We feel that things are really bad." But then again, if you play Paul Revere in that regard, now you're in the position of the governor. You create a panic. And so every person has to make that decision for themselves. I suppose one vision that I did have was ... You asked me about images before. One image that I did have that you might be interested in, and I think that really provoked my leaving, was images of 1940 in France. I teach French and images and pictures and movies that I've seen of the exodus out of Paris as the Germans were attacking. People being strafed on the roads by planes. Huge traffic jams, mile after mile. That gives you an idea of what it's like when people try to get out of a disaster area. I think that one thing that I did not want to do, besides panic anybody else I guess, was to get caught in a howling mob on the turnpike. So I think the idea was to act calmly, to drive carefully, especially in a situation like that. The traffic, by the way, was not too much heavier than we normally experienced, except at rest stops going west, we noticed many families with young children in a car getting out. We feel also that the numbers of people who left were purposely minimized by the governor's office. They were claiming 50,000, I think it's been said that it's been closer to 200,000. That was in evidence on the turnpike.

INT: Before you left, did you start talking about this with your friends and your co-workers?

MK: Oh, yes. Not co-workers so much as friends, neighbors, to some degree co-workers, yes.

INT: What kinds of things did you talk about?

MK: Basically about how serious it really was. Not the fact that it did happen or didn't happen or how competent they were or how incompetent and whether they could stop it or not, but really exactly what was going on. And of course nobody really knew. And as I said before, I think people's opinions were divided along the kinds of lines I expressed before.

INT: I'm sure you discussed it a lot with your wife?

MK: Oh, yes.

INT: What kinds of things did you get into?

MK: Well, she was basically... she was, I think, close to panic at some points. Extremely upset. Totally unbelieving of anything that was being said and very worried about the baby. And her attitude was "Why stay." What is there to be gained to stay. A couple of days of classes can be made up, can be rescheduled. It was certainly her idea that was not a major thing. The main point for her was "why take chances with our lives, but especially why take the chance with the little one."

INT: So her fear was more wrapped up in the baby than anything else?

MK: Yes, oh sure.

INT: So you thought this incident was similar to 1940 France?

MK: No, what I said was, I think one of the potentials for disaster is the fact that the evacuation plan may be... Cumberland County happens to have a good one. But even if they had tried to evacuate the area, there would have been, I think, traffic jams. There would have been accidents on the turnpike. They would have opened up probably four lanes going west or what have you. I guess that one of the images that I don't particularly like, which came to my consciousness at this time, were images of hoards of people trying to escape an imminent danger and all the consequences that have to be paid in that regard. Those images happened to come to me from images of 1940 France.

INT: So did you see the incident as similar to anything else that's ever happened in history?

MK: No, otherwise, it was completely dissimilar. I've never lived in an area where they have hurricanes or great flooding or natural disasters, so this is my first experience with something that maybe people who live along the Gulf Coast feel every September when the hurricane come out. I don't know. To me it's completely unique.

INT: Did it seem... Did it bring to mind any of your own personal experiences?

MK: Well, some army experiences, but nothing like this. Nothing on this scale. I was in Thailand during the Vietnam era and we had a couple of close scares and a couple of incidents. But there you're in a trench and you have a gun and somehow when it comes to defending yourself, you say to yourself, "there are some things that I really don't want to do, but I suppose I will have to do it if it's a case of preserving my own life." Here it's much more impersonal, of course, it's on a much larger scale.

INT: Did you think that this incident would have been more or less frightening than something like a flood of a hurricane or even war?

MK: I think it was much more frightening in the sense that it's the unknown. Radiation is invisible. And then again the information of what was going on was not available. If a flood comes, or a hurricane, you normally have warning. There are certain people who made you feel foolish for leaving. I think their logic is wrong. They see nothing happen so why did you leave. I think it's absolutely false logic. However, what's interesting about it is that if the weather service had said look "there's a tremendous hurricane coming this way. People would evacuate." Then they say "Oh sure, let's evacuate." Because they can't see radiation, because they don't know the potential for this kind of thing, they tend to say "There's no sense leaving."

INT: You say that you thought of "China Syndrome." Did you think of any other movies or TV shows or any books that you may have read?

MK: Well, in a kind of... occasionally in a kind of a philosophical mood, Camus' The Plague came to mind. And I suppose some of Arthur Cossler's things where they started running into the doublespeak kinds of things I was hearing on TV.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any song?

MK: No.

INT: Did you have any daydreams that you remember?

MK: Not that I can remember now, no.

INT: How about sleeping dreams?

MK: My wife has had some, I have not.

INT: Have you had any since?

MK: No.

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

MK: Well, again, particularly in my wife. People, by the way out in Ohio, didn't understand our reaction at all. Totally uncomprehending. My wife has still been affected to this day. She's undergoing medical, regular medical examinations. I think that the thing set off something that may be related migraines. She has had migraine headaches in the past, but it set off a reaction that neurologists are still not sure about. As a matter of fact, she has an appointment for yet another battery of tests in Harrisburg in a couple of weeks. There's some sort of an electrical impulse in her eye that's creating a sort of flashing light behind her eye and they don't know. And it happened, by the way, during TMI.

INT: So she'll remember it.

MK: Yes.

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

MK: I think I heard them. I tend to forget them. They're sort of like Polish jokes, in kind of bad taste. I sort have let them go in one ear and out the other. I think I heard some, but I couldn't quote them to you, no.

INT: At the time did you think it was funny?

MK: No.

INT: Not at all?

MK: I still don't.

INT: How about the people around you? Did the other people listening?

MK: Some did, but I think it's a function of how they reacted to the thing, whether they tended to minimize or maximize it.

INT: Why do you think there was so much joking?

MK: It's gallows humor, isn't it? Black humor.

INT: Did you start thinking about any kind of joking that may have occurred during Vietnam or Kennedy's assassination or anything like that?

MK: I never heard any joking about Kennedy's assassination and I can't say I heard much about Vietnam either. Of course, I was in the Vietnam theater and we didn't joke much about it.

INT: Have you developed an opinion about nuclear energy?

MK: Yes, I think it's an undesirable thing. I do. And I decided and my wife has decided that we're going to work against its development. It's an uphill battle, believe me.

INT: Had you been against nuclear energy before this happened?

MK: Not at all. I had been rather indifferent to the whole issue. In fact, I suppose you can say that it takes something like this to awaken your consciousness, to radicalize you.

INT: So you're definitely fighting against it now?

MK: Yes.

INT: In what ways?

MK: Well, we belong to TMIA. We joined a letter writing campaign. We're staffing a booth at the Carlisle Fair. We're trying to recruit other people to join the group. To put political pressure on. To raise funds, that type of thing. We've gone to rallies.

INT: What is TMIA?

MK: Three Mile Island Alert. And they had been fighting Three Mile Island for three years before this incident. It's the local anti-nuke group. There's one in Susquehanna Valley, one in and there's one down in York, but this one's in Harrisburg so it's the one that centralizes things in our area.

INT: Is there anything else that you'd like to say about all this? Something I may have forgotten?

MK: No, you've covered an awful lot. It's very good. Not that I can think of offhand I suppose, no.