

Date; July 17, 1979

Occupation; President SGL Abrasives

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

NARRATOR: I t was probably on the television that I heard it. And this would be, since I'm a regular participant in the 6:00 news it would be when it was first. . .

INT: Right in the middle of the week there.. Did you know that there was a reactor there in Harrisburg?

NAR: Oh yes. I do quite a bit of traveling by air and there's no question about seeing it and knowing it was there. Yes I was aware it was there.

INT: Did you realize how far it was from us, did you know the miles?

NAR: I'm not 100 percent certain of that distance today, I think it's about 40 miles to the airport and I guess it's about 40 miles away, that's my guess.

INT: When did you first hear about it, when did you think or talk about it, what were your ideas on it?

NAR: Well I have an abiding Faith in technology and technologists and I wasn't concerned. My basic attitude was that the newspapers were over-reacting to the situation.

INT: Did you feel it was a serious situation?

NAR: I didn't know and I don't know to this day how serious it was in terms of potential.

INT: Did your attitude change later on from that point?

NAR: Only slightly. It changed in the sense that I think I was completely...my attitude basically was that there was no real problem at all. And now my attitude is that I really don't know how great the problem was. I don't think it was potentially serious problem, but I can't say that for sure because nobody has ever told mc what the potential for seriousness was

INT: At that point, did you seek out further information?

NAR: Only from friends that I con to be knowledgeable. People that I know that work for PP&L various scientific people that I know.

INT: Did you talk about it with friends or family?

NAR: Oh yes, it was cocktail... I have a daughter and son in-law who live in Carlisle and she has 2 young boys one is less than a year and the other is about 2 years. I spent I think it was Sunday, I spent at least an hour and a half on the phone with her. A Monday I spent an equal amount of time on the phone with her. And finally told her that for her own peace of mind she should leave if she felt that the danger was that real. That I didn't share her concern but that I could understand her position. And as a result she took her 2 children and went down to Richmond to be with her brother - - Richmond , Virginia - - and spent a fair amount of time down there.

INT: How did you feel about other's reaction's to the situation?

NAR: Well I felt that most people were reacting emotionally because they really didn't understand the concern. People did interesting and funny things. People who left Carlisle, some of them. . . Well , one person I know that left Carlisle went up to Mifflintown. And the reason they were able to go to Mifflintown is that the people who lived in Mifflintown that knew had departed for a further away place, and another group that I knew went to New Jersey. Well if there was a kind of radiation exposure and if you know anything about prevailing winds, they were riding into the situation rather than away from it. So these are emotional acts, not rational acts.

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

NAR: Most. . . well I did all there I guess. Because much of my traveling is by car and I have the radio on constantly and I was in touch with the whole picture. I also went to Detroit during that time because my wife was in Detroit for a good part of the time because she was in the process of settling her mother's estate- her mother having died and her sister lives in Detroit. So I was able to get a distant view of the thing, which was kind of curious and interesting.

INT: I'm sure.

JG: It seemed to me that the danger that we were in magnified the further away we got from home.

INT: I know from my parents calling that they were much more frightened. Do you remember any particular sources that you listened to or watched?

NAR: I always watch CBS as a news source and a radio source. And . . . I mean a television source and a radio source. And I had read the Sentinel. The Sentinel is the paper that I take, and the Wall Street Journal.

INT: Did you pay more attention to these than usual, were listening more closely?

NAR: I was listening for that subject, certainly. And I was particularly interested in the diagrams that appeared and I was interested also on what - who was the spokesman that did such a good job, what was his name?

INT: Denton?

NAR: Yes, and what he said. Because he was believable. He seemed to be straightforward, he was willing to say that he didn't know what he didn't know. And as time went on, you got the impressions that what he did say turned out to be right or at right as he understood it at that time.

INT: How do you feel about the media's handling of the situation?

NAR: Mixed. I felt that there were some badly done things. And I thought that there were some very well done things. The newspapers by and large did a good job. I thought that the radio and the television were often guilty of scare things. I particularly was disappointed in my favorite radio show, All Things Considered, when they did that job on Hershey, the chocolate bars. They asked the Hershey people if the Existence of Hershey's cows so close to Three Mile Island would cause radiation problems in chocolate bars. Would this be the end of the Hershey bar? When in fact 2 days before the governor had declared all the milk in the area safe. And there's no reason to ask that question.

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

NAR: I thought Thornburg did an excellent job. And Denton as I have mentioned I was pleased with. By and large I thought most of the government, I thought most of the government did a good job. I can't specifically point out any who didn't do a good job. I don't think they over reacted. They did the thing that had to be done, as a proof of measure. The organization of the evacuation thing, and what I learned later which zoomed to be very sensible and something I never thought of, was that 11 of the interstate highways would be one way going a' from the sight. I thought that was marvelous, to think that 4 lanes on the turnpike, lanes on carrying people away, both directions and that was sensible.

INT: How did you feel about the industries handling of the situation or Met Ed?

NAR: This is a far away view. I think Met Ed is to be faulted for the way they handled it in the beginning. I think later on they did a good job only because they had the right kind of advice from the various agencies, who were doing a good job. Met-Ed in the beginning tried to cover the thing up. Or if they didn't try to cover it up they didn't have an awareness of the degree of public reaction to the situation. One or the other.

INT: Was there anyone that you found particularly reliable or that you trusted more than others?

NAR: Well, Denton.

INT: Denton, was there anyone that you particularly mistrusted?

NAR: No, nobody rose to the point where I'd even remember the name in that sense. There were obviously some people who came on the television, on the radio but I

sounded like they were either self serving or didn't know what they were talking about. But I can't remember them, they weren't consistent enough.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: What reassured you about this?

NAR: Well, the only thing that reassures me about it at all is that you don't build a reactor, you don't start a reactor and you don't run a reactor without knowing what's going on. Now I run a plant here, for a great number of years, things go wrong in this plant, and an outsider can come in and say why didn't you do this or why didn't you think of that, when things go wrong, you take the measure and you do correct them. And what happened there was the that something went wrong, and they did take the measures and they did correct it. The difference was that they were under a microscope and every step of the way we had a million people saying why didn't you think of this before, why didn't you do that before. I don't think there was ever a time when they truly didn't know what was going on. The point is that in a situation like that you cannot say everything you know because you dare not give misleading information. And when you have to stand up I served some time on Borough Council here in Carlisle, and I know as an amateur politician that you dare not stand up in front of the newspapers and say well , we have 2 options here and we're not sure which way we want to go , but this is the situation as it is right now, and I'm not sure about this that the next thing , because that's the kind of thing the newspapers are crucifying. They don't know how to handle it. They don't know how to handle somebody being candid. They're not prepared for that, they're prepared instead to do investigative journalism which really means, find catching people in lies.

INT: Do you feel now that those in charge are, in control?

NAR: Unh—huh, yes. Well, I drive to the airport as I did, as will do tomorrow morning and see no smoke coming out of the big stacks, they have to be in control, nothing is happening.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: No, not at all. It didn't concern a me in the least to go to the airport, wait for my plane and take off I didn't think the place was going to blow up all of the sudden, although I had visitors here who were very unhappy about having to drive past Three Mile Island on the turnpike when on their way back to Philadelphia.

INT: How was the airport during that time, you say you were there, were their more people there?

NAR: No, it was, of course the Harrisburg Airport is not O'Hare Airport, it's never crowded, but if anything it was less crowded during that time.

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

NAR: Well I was thinking of one little amusing incident and that was that I planned to go to dinner at Alfred's Victorian and called up to make a reservation and found out they weren't open because of this matter. No, I made no changes in my plans.

INT: What did you think about leaving the area?

NAR: Well, I didn't intend to leave the area at all.

INT: Not at all?

NAR: No, even if something drastic happened as pictured and there was this great cloud of radioactive material I felt that, what I know about radioactivity I wouldn't be harmed in the least by whatever was potentially, my view of what could potentially happen. So I didn't feel it was necessary for me to evacuate. And indeed, as I understand it now, this is in retrospect, were to evacuate people to Carlisle, so it would be foolish of me to consider to evacuate someplace else.

INT: Is there someone in your life that you were watching in order to decide what you would do at all?

NAR: No, just me.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was happening at TMI or what might happen?

NAR: Yes, there were mental pictures. First general understanding I had was when I learned the whole thing was contained in a foot thick concrete cube. Then I began to relate my understanding of stresses and structures and I realized that probably the worst thing that could happen would be if there was an explosion, this cube would crack and gasses would escape and then the gasses would be harmful but there was no possibility in my mind for some kind of atomic explosion, or mushroom clouds and the like. In other words it wouldn't be catastrophic in nature, it would be if anything, and if I could term it in this sense not a hard catastrophe but a soft catastrophe.

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

NAR: No.

INT: How about in the future?

NAR: No.

INT: What other aspects of your life might have been affected?

NAR: The only aspect that probably effected is my pocketbook because I think we need nuclear energy and I think the future for it is very (mumbled)

INT: How about your community, how would that be effected?

NAR: This community?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: I don't think it was effected at all. If anything it may be affected positively, because an awful lot of people want to see Three Mile Island now, so we may have a few more tourists who will also come to Carlisle as they go past, and in that sense that would be positive and I don't think of any negative aspects. We're not serviced by Met-Ed, so that doesn't affect us, and indeed we're fortunate to have PP&L which is primarily a, coal based electrical generator, company and so we have what President Carter said is the energy goal for the future, already.

INT: If the worst had occurred do you think your health might have been effected?

NAR: Well I think I answered that before, first of all I'm not sure what the worst was, but my own view of the worst, was such that I don't think my health could've been effected.

INT: Did you ever have any concern about the food of the milk in the area?

NAR: Oh , no

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

NAR: Do you mean as a result of TMI? No.

INT: You didn't have any mental pictures or that kind of thing?

NAR: No there's more radiation from the sun everyday then I expected to receive from Three Mile Island. Everything looked very health.

INT: My questions seemed a little over blown now, did you think about your own death?

NAR: I expect to live until I'm ninety.

INT: Well that answers that one did you think about god during the incident?

NAR: Not any more than I normally do.

INT: Did GOD figure into all of this?

NAR: Oh, I'm not a fundamentalist at all, no; I am a believer in pre-ordained activity.

INT: Did you feel you had certain responsibilities during the incident, toward your family?

NAR: Oh, definitely, I had a responsibility toward my daughter who was concerned. Uh, at that time I had another daughter who was living with us, and she had a granddaughter who was about 5 years old, it was a different situation. And I certainly had a responsibility to them. Uh but I was confident in two things, the distance that we were away from Three Mile Island, and I believe in the technology that led to nuclear energy. My concern for my daughter, and I recommended to go to Richmond for her mental well being. I didn't think she was in any danger nor her children.

INT: Was your job or work effected by TMI?

NAR: No, there was not absentee right here. I can't think of anything that happened at the plant other than a lot of conversation. That represented an adverse effect. I don't think we even had an appointment cancelled. (Mumbled) Well, I know that lots of things were cancelled, activities were cancelled, civic club activities and that kind of thing, but I can't think of anything that we had going on here that was...

INT: Did you have things to do that you otherwise would not have had to do?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any ideas on how to it would be best to behave in such a situation, moral or ethical or even religious? Or just your own personal?

NAR: No, I don't criticize people who did things other than the way I did. I think everybody handled these things in their own way. And especially if we were dealing with a bomb, and we understood that it was a bomb, and it might go off, it might not go off, then I would say there are definitely some things you should do. Find the perimeter effects the bomb, everybody should be cleared out. It should be optional for people who are beyond the perimeter effect, if they want to be cleared out. And this is mandatory and you should do it. But we didn't know what we were dealing with, I still don't know what we were dealing with. So, who can react, if you lived across the river in the reactor you should react in a different way than the people who lived in Carlisle. And within the confines of Carlisle, people should react differently then age, their circumstance in life and their feeling on it. So, I don't have any set rules that people should have followed.

INT: At the time did this event bring to mind any past experiences or past events?

NAR: Yeah, one was the Cuban Missile crisis, I think the ever present threat of nuclear war is what I likened this to because that's the picture that conjured up most often Not directly, but indirectly by reporters. So that's what that brought to mind.

INT: Did anything like this happen to you before or in history? Evacuation and that kind of thing? That was brought to mind at the time?

NAR: The closest thing I came of was in 1943 there were race riots in Detroit and the place was declared an emergency and no more than two people could gather together or they could be taken and called a mob and taken away. And unfortunately I graduated from high school during that time, didn't want to give up our graduation privileges and so we constituted a mob, six of us got in a car, drove around, did things, graduated in the (mumbled high school) But the city of Detroit was like a city under siege at that time and one never knew what was going to happen although I'm sure the danger was not imminent, it's just that, you didn't know what the danger was and that was a similar time.

INT: Was this incident more or less frightening than say a flood or a hurricane or war or anything like that?

NAR: War, I didn't get very close to, World War II. I never left this country even though I was in the service for two years I'd never been shot at. I think war would be much more difficult to handle than this situation was. A flood once again is very predictable. There's not much you can do about it, but it's very predictable I think it was the unpredictability of the situation that was perhaps so different for some people to handle.

INT: Did any TV shows or movies come to mind?

NAR: No, but I was supposed to go and see China Syndrome in Chicago just the week before all this happened and I didn't I chose to see a play instead. And I suspect that would come to mind if I had seen it. There was another one I saw on television prior to that which dealt with some kind of danger in a nuclear plant. It was a year or so before and then it was replayed right after Three Mile Island. But I must admit it didn't come to mind until I saw it the second time and realized that I had seen it before.

INT: How about any books or stories?

NAR: No

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: Well a number of Barber Shoppers here in town but. (mumbled)

INT: I guess what you're asking for there is a, some people turned 1960 protest songs around to fit this or they?

NAR: No, I'm afraid not.

INT: Or made up their own words?

NAR: No, I...

INT: I'm always a little embarrassed to ask that question.



NAR: No I didn't do that although there were a lot of these Three Mile Island jokes around.

INT: Did you hear any?

NAR: Sure, The Bishop of the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania in response to, when he was at a meeting with a bunch of bishops, and this one church told him he was the Bishop of Three Mile Island. I can't remember any others but that one I do remember.

INT: Did you see any posters or graffiti about Three Mile Island?

NAR: Still see them.

INT: Do you?

NAR: Yeah, I saw a bumper sticker just the other day that I survived TMI. Yes I've seen some tee shirts.

INT: Did you hear any new words or funny remarks that you remember during that time?

NAR: No, but I think its interesting how the TMI incident is part of our culture and will mean something just in the same sense that (mumbled) became a word that was in common use, and the same sense that Hershey means chocolate. It'll be a common word that will, and Watergates is a very good example, and TMI will take its place in the vocabulary.

INT: About the jokes, did you hear many jokes from people?

NAR: Yeah, one of my favorite ones that had to Skylab falling on Three Mile Island, some how they got and Edsel in there too.

INT: Were you laughing at the time that these jokes were told?

NAR: Sure, absolutely.

INT: Did you tell them to anyone else, tell any jokes?

NAR: If I can remember, I tell jokes to other people if I like them.

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

NAR: Well the old nursery rhymes are, and sure are political jokes, and part of our whole system of coping with things is to make jokes about it and that's exactly what we were doing.

INT: What joking do you remember from other rises, and I have a little list here, Pearl Harbor, Kennedy Assassinations, or the invasion of Cambodia, or Guyana, Jonestown? Do you remember any joking from those?

NAR: I remember a horrible joke about Jonestown. I can't really remember but there was a really sick kind of joke about Jonestown, I just forget what it was. Pearl Harbor there must have been some jokes about Pearl Harbor but I can't remember it now. It was such a long time ago, I was about 16 years old at the time so that's a long time ago. I can't remember any specific jokes about (mumbled).

INT: Okay, at the time did you have any daydreams that you remember, about TMI?

NAR: I think it was on my mind occasionally. I think I tried to conjure up, I only seen one nuclear reactor and it was a water reactor, where the whole thing is under deep, what they call a swimming pool reactor, or a deep (mumbled) water or something. And I tried to conjure up a mental image of what this reactor looked like. I understand the process it went through. I tried to understand the problems that they were having, and certainly I thought about it when I was shaving, when I was cutting the grass, (mumbled). And I tried to conjure up an image of the various forms of catastrophe that might take place. Whether any of them were accurate or not.

INT: What kinds of things were you thinking about?

NAR: Well, as I described to you this concrete cube and then someone talked about a melt down, in which the mass of radiant would all melt and dig a deep hole in the earth the more I thought about that the more ridiculous it seemed.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams at the time?

NAR: No, my wife and I were talking about that the other day, I saw, I guess everybody dreams but I seldom remember my dreams.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed in any way?

NAR: No, hardly anything disturbs my sleep.

INT: What changes happened to the people around you during the incident, did you notice any?

NAR: Not specifically. Certainly everyone here was talking about it in the same sense that everybody talked about the Ages flood when it was and the same sense that everybody talked about Skylab just before it came down. And it was a topic of conversation but I don't think it changed the way anybody was or acted in my circle of awareness.

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

NAR: Yes, I think it solidified the nuclear energy question in people's minds. Their position on nuclear energy problem.

J Grantt; They are no longer to give it thought or?

NAR: Well, I think prior to Three Mile Island a lot of people had no position, they were among those who don't know, I think they took the positions after facing this, The populous, crystallizes into two camps, on a situation then you're more likely to get something to happen in a democracy, and I suspect that more people became anti-nuclear energy in terms of power plant generation, then were before. And I think the crystallizing that you see is the balance or power against that kind of thing. Therefore I think we're in real trouble actually, because I think we need nuclear energy if we're going to have the electricity that we need and the years 1990 and 2000. But, in our country the way we operate I think that's not going to happen.

INT: Did the incident change you in any lasting way?

NAR: No.

INT: Have you developed an opinion on nuclear energy?

NAR: Yes, I think nuclear energy is safe, I think it's necessary, I think its interim to the solution rather than the solution for all time, and forced to be right after (mumbled) I think there are some problems with this condition of waste, and there are problems with any energy creating system that we have today, so I don't consider that to be a reason for not pursuing this. And our short fall in electricity will be evident between the years 1990 and 2000 and it will be too late to do anything about it, (mumbled) So I think the future is preordained, I don't know what to do about it, and so I don't know what to do about it, and I don't have any control over it, and I don't think about it, its not going to d any good.

INT: How would you feel if they were to build a nuclear reactor in your back yard?

NAR: It wouldn't really bother me that much. I don't have that big a backyard but . . . I guess three mile island is almost close enough to be considered a back yard and it doesn't bother me and there's one up, there's one down in Peach Bottom and there's another one up north near Williamsport or something, I really wouldn't mind if they built one in Carlisle.

INT: Is there anything else that you want to say about all this? Any questions I missed or ran over too fast?

NAR: No, I guess in sum total what I have to say is that, oh; I remember one of the jokes. Well, first of all I think that the, joke pattern was that you must remember more people died at Chappaquiddick then dies at Three Mile Island. That's going to be the Republican slogan if Kennedy runs President.