

[NOTE: As the tape starts, the narrator is talking about working as a nurse in an X-ray room without any special protection – she says that towards the end of her career they were supposed to wear lead aprons.]

Date: June 26, 1979

Occupation: Nurse, Retired

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

NARRATOR: I guess the day it happened. March 28.

INT: Boy, you got it down to the day. You've got a sharp memory.

NAR: I watch television, that's all.

INT: Did you hear it off of the television then?

NAR: Yeah, I heard it on television and I read it in the paper.

INT: Was there any particular channel or paper?

NAR: *The Patriot* is what I read it in, and I watched on channel 27.

INT: What did you think about when you first heard about it?

NAR: Well, I wasn't too alarmed, because I sort of worked with radiation most of my life and I figured an x-ray is as much as maybe they are getting there, so... People are x-rayed every day and don't think anything of it.

INT: So it was just because it was something that...

NAR: Something new and something big. It really didn't alarm me, I thought, well – things aren't as bad as what they seem.

INT: Did you try to find out more information on what was happening down there?

NAR: No, I just watched the television and the newspapers.

INT: So you pretty well kept up as you had been.

NAR: Yes. I watched all the TV programs.

INT: Do you ever think it became a serious situation?

NAR: No, I didn't. Because... I don't know, I just felt, well, it was seemingly, as what the paper and TV said, and it was keeping at a level. And there was no use to get alarmed, and... if I'da gotten alarmed in my work in my years, I coulda exploded any day. So I didn't...

INT: So you pretty much knew what was going on.

NAR: Yeah.

INT: And you'd had experience with it?

NAR: I had experience with x-rays and all that, and... standing by, and... You never know when you're gonna explode, you stand beside an x-ray table. *[Laughs.]*

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

NAR: No, not too much. I didn't go into much about it because I thought probably the less said the better off.

INT: Why was that? Because people were so worked up or...?

NAR: Yes, and you might say something to them that would make them apprehensive, and they'd maybe take the wrong impression of what you said, so I thought, the least said the better.

INT: How do you feel about the way people were reacting to it?

NAR: Well I did think people in our town here were overreacting, but maybe those who were very close were entitled to leave, but I didn't feel that we had any cause to be apprehensive about it.

INT: What changes did you notice in the people around you?

NAR: Well, I noticed some left *[laughing]*. Especially those who had small children. People had twins across the street, they left. But – they went to Connecticut, but... so I don't know... Other than that I didn't think there was any reason to get excited about it.

INT: Do you think that it has changed anyone in a lasting way? Maybe psychologically or some way that you know of? Did you see anything drastic?

NAR: No, not really in town. Not here, I didn't.

INT: All right. How do you feel about the way the media handled the situation?

NAR: Well, I don't know. I suppose they handled it the best that they could. At least they tried. And I think they do the best that they can.

INT: So you thought it was a pretty good job considering the circumstances?

NAR: Considering the circumstances, I think that they handled it very well.

INT: What about the way government handled it?

NAR: Well, I guess they did the same too, but... I think the employees should be better educated. The ones who live, or who worked, around them, and any... Anything that wasn't right, or anything... that, the meter, or the things that weren't reading right, they should have notified to the head authorities right away, that should have been notified right away. I know we always did, when anything went wrong we notified them *right away*, not wait a couple hours.

INT: So Metropolitan Edison could have done a little bit better job there?

NAR: I think if they would educate their people, and say, "If anything's the least bit off, it should be notified." I know they get very cross at you for saying, maybe it's a false alarm, *but* – false alarm is better than something happening.

INT: Yeah. Yeah, you could have probably avoided all the panic. Was there anyone that you particularly trusted during the whole thing?

NAR: Well, I think that Denton was one of the key men of the thing and I think he was very well educated and... knew exactly what he was doing.

INT: Was there anyone who you particularly mistrusted?

NAR: Not particularly. No.

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

NAR: There must have been someone that either overlooked something or didn't do what he was supposed to do at the time that it happened. Where else... there musta been some reason for it because if there was some reading off they should have notified the authorities right away rather than wait, and I do think the government should have been notified much sooner than they were.

INT: Yeah. Do you feel that they are in control of it right now?

NAR: Well, I hope so! I think they are. I hope so and I think they are. I don't think there is any danger.

INT: Would you be worried about them reopening it?

NAR: No, because I think the future will probably be nuclear energy and what other alternative do we have?

INT: Yeah, we've got to do something, and that seems to be the most...

NAR: There has to be something and I don't know what else because... it's just, it's everywhere.

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

NAR: No.

INT: You didn't change your daily routine?

NAR: Oh, no no. No. I just watched the TV and read the paper more.

INT: Did you leave at all during the situation? Either because of this or for any other reason?

NAR: No, I always read and I always watch TV but I did watch a little more and watched more stations than what I had at that time. But I wasn't alarmed at any time.

INT: Did you think that your health might have been affected by this?

NAR: No, I don't think so.

INT: Not any more than your working in the operating room?

NAR: No, working in the operating room with x-ray being taken daily and you stand there beside the table, you... I had the same radiation there as if I would get here. It really didn't alarm me at all.

INT: Did you think about God at all during the incident?

NAR: I went to church and I prayed. Outside of that why...

INT: Did you pray about the incident?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: What did you pray about?

NAR: Well, to hope that they would get it under control.

INT: Did any biblical images come to your mind?

NAR: No, not that I can think of right now. Maybe they did then, but I can't think of them now.

INT: When you went to church, did they mention the incident during the service at all?

NAR: Yes, the minister preached on the atomic energy. And I thought that week if he wouldn't have had that Three Mile Island, he wouldn't have known what to preach on.
[Both laugh.]

INT: Did that affect your attitude towards Three Mile Island at all, what he preached about?

NAR: No, no. I'm not a person to change my mind, I sort of make up my mind and I stick to that unless someone else can say that I'm really wrong.

INT: Did you see fewer or more people at the service? Did attendance change at all, because... during that time?

NAR: Oh. No, no, it didn't change. No.

INT: Do you think that religious persons or institutions should take a public stand, for or against nuclear power?

NAR: Well, I don't know, I sort of feel the church should stick to their religion and the government to theirs. I don't think the church would like the government coming in and telling them how to run the church, so I know the Lutherans are doing something in a senate [?] about it, they're having a... committee or a meeting or something about which I don't just altogether ... I think they should give it a little more thought. But I don't feel that ... just like politics, I ... Religion of politics don't mix either.

INT: That's an old saying, too. *[Both laugh.]* Did you have any ideas of how it would be best to behave in such a situation? You mentioned before about staying calm yourself and not mentioning it to other people, that's something that might upset things. Did anything else come into play? A religious or moral... anything like that?

NAR: Not really, I didn't ... I just didn't, I thought they were making more of it than what should be made of it. And I know from things that had happened in the operating room and everything is all right. It usually comes out all right.

INT: At the time, did this event bring to mind any past experiences or past events? You mentioned the operating room as one really important parallel?

NAR: Yes, when something catches on fire in the operating room with all that oxygen flying around, my... It's a little hairy for a few minutes.

INT: I didn't know things caught on fire in operating rooms.

NAR: Oh, yeah. They do occasionally. They have a live cautery or they have a cautery [*somewhat unclear*], and something will catch on fire. What mostly... what they, the thing that I saw, the doctor threw himself over the patient and outened it.

INT: Did you think of anything else beside the operating room? Crises there?

NAR: No, that's the only place that I've ever had much experience.

INT: Did you think of any historical events?

NAR: No, I can't say I did. [*Laughs.*]

INT: Did any TV shows or movies or radio shows come to your mind? Anything stick out?

NAR: No. I hadn't seen that *China Syndrome* so I didn't know anything about that. I just didn't see it because it seemed a little far-fetched to me and I just didn't watch it.

INT: Would you want to see *The China Syndrome* now?

NAR: Well, I could watch it, but it wouldn't change my opinion or my views on anything.

INT: I saw that movie right before – right before the nuclear thing, and as soon as they mentioned there was a radiation leak, I was like, “Ahhhhhhhhh!” [*Laughs.*] “*The China Syndrome!*” All right – did you think of any books or stories?

NAR: Mmm... no.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs? Any lyrics going over in your mind?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Any night dreams?

NAR: No. [*Both laugh.*]

INT: Did it disturb your sleep at all?

NAR: No, it didn't disturb my sleep at all.

INT: Did you hear any jokes about radiation or TMI?

NAR: No, I didn't. I did hear someone, that there was a song. I don't even know what it was. I did hear it but I couldn't say what it was, about Three Mile Island.

INT: Was this on the radio? Or was it just someone singing?

NAR: I think it was someone sang it and then there was – in the paper there was a couple little articles about Three Mile Island, but I didn't – I didn't bother much with them.

INT: What do you think about people who do joke? Does that upset you?

NAR: No, it don't upset me, no. It doesn't upset me. I don't get upset very easily.

INT: Have you ever heard any joking from other crisis like Pearl Harbor or the Kennedy assassinations?

NAR: Oh yes, yes, I've heard...

INT: Do you remember any of it?

NAR: No, I don't remember them anymore but I remember there were jokes and stories about that.

INT: Oh good. That's a good point. All right, do you have any idea as to why people joke?

NAR: I don't know. Maybe to use up their energy. I don't know. That's about the only thing I know. Maybe to get rid of their apprehension.

INT: That's what seems to be coming out. What is your opinion of nuclear energy? You mentioned before that you're for it?

NAR: I think that the future, that's what it will be, and we are going to have to learn to accept it. Apart from that, I don't know.

INT: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

NAR: No, not really. *[Laughs.]*

POST-INTERVIEW NOTES:

INT: After the interview the informant stated that she'd been in the operating room for twenty-three years, and that this was the most important reason as to why she wasn't frightened during the whole affair. She felt that she'd been exposed to so much radiation

that a little bit more wouldn't hurt. *[Pause.]* However she did add that if she had known a little bit more before she began her work in the operating room, she probably wouldn't have entered that type of a job because it could have been hazardous – and that if she hadn't known about x-rays, she probably would have been frightened, just like the other people were.