

Date: May 23, 1979

Occupation: High school student

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

NARRATOR: I guess it was, I think it was in school, or....what day was it that it happened, it was in the morning, wasn't it?

INT: Yes.

NAR: It must have been in school, yeah.

INT: Okay. And from whom did you hear it?

NAR: From my father, he was listening to the radio, he has a radio in his office.

INT: Were you worried about it at that point?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you feel it was a serious situation?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Was it a crisis?

NAR: I thought so at first, yeah.

INT: You said at first, did you calm down afterwards?

NAR: Well, it was – I wasn't sure. I felt like I wasn't being told much.

INT: By the media?

NAR: Yeah. I think they....after it all happened, you know, I think they just blew it up too much. But – I don't know.

INT: Did you seek out further information?

NAR: Not really. Well I listened to the news all the time I just listened, but I didn't actually go try to find stuff.

INT: Was that television or radio?

NAR: Both.

INT: Any particular channel?

NAR: Twenty-seven.

INT: Or a station on the radio, any particular one?

NAR: Um...WHP, I think it was, the one in Harrisburg, the main one I guess it was.

INT: Did you listen to them because you were used to listening to them, or did you think you were getting better coverage?

NAR: No, I just – yeah, I thought – We had it on all the time. I thought that they'd tell us what we needed to know.

INT: They'd give you the scoop?

NAR: Yeah.

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

NAR: Yeah. Both. All the time, it seems like.

INT: What did you talk about?

NAR: Like, when I talked with my parents, they tried to explain what was going on and what happened. And with my friends, mainly about if we're going to leave, you know, evacuate and stuff like that. And it was mainly about leaving and what we'd do if certain things happened.

INT: What would have caused you to leave?

NAR: Um... Wow. Just the radiation, if it was more, and if there was just any doubt, more of a doubt than what there was. Then we would have packed up and leave. And if they evacuated just ten miles even, we would have left. Because I think Carlisle is twenty-some miles.

INT: Yeah. So once you, if the danger had increased at all, you would have gone?

NAR: Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

INT: Were you packed up at all?

NAR: Well, we just had, like, a suitcase out and we had some food ready to go to my grandmother's *[laughing]*.

INT: Where does your grandmother live?

NAR: Altoona.

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

NAR: Some I thought over-reacted. But then as time went on I felt that they weren't reacting.....and that people were just thinking, "oh, nothing is going to happen." It was like mixed up. Either people were too much or not at all.

INT: Do you think there was a difference the way the different ages looked at it? Like say people in school opposed to adults?

NAR: No, I don't....I didn't find that.

INT: Did you feel you over-reacted at all or under-reacted?

NAR: I think I under-reacted. I think I was a little bit naïve about it. I think, you know, nothing's going to happen.

INT: So you said you thought the media blew everything out of proportion?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you feel like you were getting enough information from the media?

NAR: No. I thought they were just.....like, I talked to my grandmother on the phone and what she said wasn't....you know, it was totally different from what we heard. And...

INT: Was that just conflicting reports that made it different?

NAR: Yeah. It just – I didn't know what to think.

INT: Do you think it was the officials feeding the information to the media or it was the way the media was putting it out?

NAR: I think it was both.

INT: Did you trust government officials or media or Met Ed people over one another? Who did you trust more?

NAR: I thought I should trust the officials more.

INT: Which officials, government or Met-Ed?

NAR: The government.

INT: Did you make any plans different from what you'd ordinarily have done?

NAR: Oh yeah, not going outside, and I wasn't allowed out at night, you know, if anything happened my parents wanted to make sure they knew where I was at all times. I didn't like that too much *[laughs]*.

INT: I don't blame you. Did you feel they were justified, or do you think they were going too far?

NAR: Yeah, 'cause like, then I was bringing up, that I was naïve and I wasn't sure, I didn't know if they were over reacting or what. I thought they were at the time really, not letting me out *[laughs]*.

INT: Did you... When did you feel it was at its peak as a crisis?

NAR: Ummm... Right before, like, when the bubble started decreasing. But then they said that the, I heard that the gauges and stuff were messed up. I don't know, I think just the – it didn't seem ever to really die down until... I don't remember what it was. At first when the president went I thought it was okay, but I think when the bubble was getting smaller, it....

INT: Did it calm you down that the president went?

NAR: No. *[INT laughs.]* At first it did but then...

INT: Then you thought about it.

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you ever leave during the incident at all?

NAR: Unh-unh, no.

INT: You didn't, not even for, like, a day or so?

NAR: You mean just to get away? No.

INT: Okay. What were you going to take with you if you thought you were going to be evacuated?

NAR: Clothes, my money, and, um... what was it... my bathing suit *[both laugh]* because my cousins had a pool.

INT: Smart *[laughing]* – give you something to do. Did you have any mental pictures of what was happening at TMI, or what might happen?

NAR: Yeah, I just thought of it blowing up, and no one would be able to come back and it would just look like a dessert and stuff, I just – I didn't know. I just thought of the worst.

INT: What would happen if it blew up, like, would the whole thing, like a big bomb, or...?

NAR: Yeah, that's what I thought it would be. Like those pictures of the... um... of Hiroshima and all that. I just thought of that, around here.

INT: Sort of the mushroom, mushroom effect.

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Would everything be leveled then like it was in those?

NAR: Yeah, and no one would be able to come back, you know, for a couple years, or like ten years or something, I was thinking.

INT: I think that's what someone else said. So were you really worried about it?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: What worried you the most, that it would...?

NAR: That it would explode or whatever.

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

NAR: Well, not me. But the people closer, with cancer and all that I think, has a great possibility.

INT: Any particular type of cancer? Skin?

NAR: I don't know. I'm not sure, I don't know the difference.

INT: Do you think you might be affected for the future?

NAR: Yeah, mentally and physically. *[Laughs.]*

INT: What other aspects of your life might have been affected? Have you changed at all, because of the incident?

NAR: Yeah, I think I'm more aware of what could happen and I'm, you know... If there was, if I lived in another place and they were going to build one, I'd, I wouldn't want it around. Like in this one class we had a film, they were going to build a nuclear reactor somewhere close to these people and I don't think I would be in favor for having it around, I knew all about this.

INT: Have you ever thought about it being there before this?

NAR: No. I just, going by I saw the stack I never really understood, until all this.

INT: It's just sort of something that you see and don't think about. *[Pause.]* Yeah, keep eating it, don't let it – just, you know, grab a bite once in a while. Oops. *[NAR laughs.]*

Doesn't matter. If – Did you picture in your mind any other effects of radiation on life around you?

NAR: Yeah, I thought about the cows and stuff like that, what would happen to them.

INT: What do you think would happen to them?

NAR: Well, the milk – you know, the milk would be messed up and that they would die.

INT: How would it kill them?

NAR: I don't know. I just pictured them dying, I don't know.

INT: What about plant life, do you think it would kill that too?

NAR: Yeah, definitely.

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

NAR: No. I don't think they, I don't think the security and the know-how was... You know, they didn't train people right or something, they weren't in full control.

INT: So do you think it's something that could be repeated, that could happen again?

NAR: If they didn't watch out, they...

INT: Was there anyone you trusted or believed more than anyone else?

NAR: Well, I felt like I should believe the President and all that stuff, but, and the governor, I think the governor did a good job, but – I think I trusted the governor, yeah.

INT: Looking back on it, do you think the people in charge were in control?

NAR: No.

INT: You still don't think so.

NAR: No.

INT: Are they in control of it right now?

NAR: I'm not sure, I don't know.

INT: You can keep chewing, or just take a bite every once in a while, so it doesn't all melt... *[laughs]*.

NAR: No, I'll just put it in the trash can, and...

INT: Um... Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: How did he figure in it all?

NAR: I don't know, I just... I don't know.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: Yeah. I do that a lot, just, you know, trying to decide... you know, I said that, asked him to just let everything be alright, so nothing too bad happens.

INT: Do you think he started the whole thing?

NAR: No. It was the ignorance of the people, I think. Definitely.

INT: So you sort of...?

NAR: He cleaned up after their mess.

INT: Okay, *[both laugh]* that's a good way to put it. Did you think of any particular religious person, like Jesus or Mary or...?

NAR: No.

INT: Just God in general? *[No audible response.]* Did you think of any Biblical stories or events or sayings?

NAR: Yeah, I thought of, you know, like on TV they had, *The Ten Commandments* – no it wasn't that, it was just *The Bible* or something... I don't know, I just of that, of all the plagues and stuff, him causing, but I don't know. I thought of it but it, trying to tie stuff in like... I don't know.

INT: Yeah, sort of... the people were so rotten that he caused something to happen, but you don't think he actually zapped up...?

NAR: No, it was just that the people...

INT: Did you think of it in terms of like a "Last Judgment" or something like that?

NAR: I thought at first, but then I just, I don't know. I put that out of my mind.

INT: Why? Did you not want to think about it or you just didn't think it was true?

NAR: No, I didn't think it was true. I think what I think about people that don't think that nuclear power plants should be around, I think they should be. But it's like the light bulb and stuff, you know, you got to give it a chance. And gasoline, when they first had it in cars, you have to give it a chance, and let them perfect it and it'll get better. That's what I think, because people are just anti-nuclear right now and I think they should let them, you know, develop it. Instead of saying no, not at all.

INT: So it's sort of like the baby stages right now, they've gotta iron out the kinks?

NAR: Yeah. They shouldn't have as many plants around, you know, that if something did happen, it'd just blow up, because they're all over the country. I think they just should have special places for them, you know.

INT: Where would those places be?

NAR: In the middle of nowhere *[laughs]*.

INT: Just in case. Like in the desert or someplace?

NAR: Yep.

INT: Did you attend church at all?

NAR: Uh, no. *[Laughs.]*

INT: Did any religious or ethical codes guide your behavior, how you acted towards other people?

NAR: No, I don't think so.

INT: Do you think that religious persons or institutions should take any public stand on human development and the use of atomic power?

NAR: No.

INT: Why?

NAR: Well, it's... I don't think it's that, they're tied in that much, I don't know.

INT: So it's more there for personal guidance rather than political?

NAR: Yeah.

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

NAR: It just reminded me of – if, if it blew up, we went up to see this crater in... I think it was in Arizona or something, just reminded me of that.

INT: Oh, was it Crater Lake?

NAR: I don't know.

INT: I was out there. *[Both laugh.]*

NAR: I don't remember, it was a long time ago. I just thought of it as that, you know, going there – and it would be like that, if anything happened.

INT: You thought the whole area would be like one big crater where it blew up?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: No one really knows what would've happened.

NAR: I'm glad nothing did. They never really – I heard that there wasn't, there hasn't been really a meltdown anywhere yet, that they've, you know, stopped it before.

INT: That's what they were saying at the College.

NAR: Yeah. That's good *[laughs]*. They're not as bad as everybody says, I guess. But didn't Met Ed – the government took over, didn't they, instead of Met-Ed, or...?

INT: I'm not really sure what happened with all the, the political things. I think there's a lot behind the scenes too. It may have been them working together.

NAR: Wow.

INT: Did you see this incident as similar to anything else in your life?

NAR: No. It was brand new, it woke me up. *[Laughs.]*

INT: How would you say it woke you up?

NAR: It just made me realize that things like that could happen. Because I never thought that anything like that would, or could.

INT: Life seems so secure. At the time did you have any daydreams that you remember? Were you fantasizing about it at all?

NAR: I just kept thinking what could happen. But not... I had a dream though that it did, and everybody had to leave, and we all went south or something, like a vacation.

INT: Wow! Was it like a mass exodus of people, or –

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Describe it.

NAR: Well, everyone, it was like, um... like a war movie or something and everyone was just leaving, you know, trying to get away. And I saw all my friends and we all just hopped in my car and went south and laid in the sun and laughed about it. *[Laughs.]*

INT: Was it a panic situation when they were leaving?

NAR: When they were leaving, yeah, but as soon as we were, like, away, like in Maryland and stuff, everything was fine.

INT: Did you think about coming back here at all during the dream?

NAR: No, we didn't come back. We just - stayed in the sun and had fun. *[Both laugh.]*

INT: And had fun. So that was a dream while you were asleep, a sleeping dream then. Did you have any others?

NAR: Just about leaving – you know, with my friends, and my family.

INT: Have you had any since?

NAR: Not really.

INT: Did any radio show, or TV show, or movie come to mind?

NAR: Um, *China Syndrome*. *[Laughs.]* I didn't see it but my family did and they were telling me all about it.

INT: Had they seen it before?

NAR: Yeah, before. They said they were really scared.

INT: So in what way did it remind you, in what way did you connect the two?

NAR: Well, about the, in the movie they said something that it was – if it blew up, it could blow up a state like Pennsylvania, and stuff like that. I *know!* Kinda just – *wow*.

INT: So you thought that might happen here, that it could be true?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Do you want to see the movie now?

NAR: Yeah. I haven't yet.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: No.

INT: A song going through you head about it, or altering a song about it?

NAR: No.

INT: What changes happened to the people around you during the incident?

NAR: Well, around our neighborhood everyone was willing to help people leave if they had to, you know, just by everybody together. In some parts it brought people together about leaving, but the panic about what could happen, everyone just going crazy, around.

INT: But in your immediate area they were all, it was more of a togetherness feeling? Where you think outside people were starting to panic and scatter more?

NAR: Yeah. Everyone I thought got closer in the neighborhood.

INT: Do you think it's a lasting effect?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you notice any other changes?

NAR: No, not that I can pick out.

INT: What about here in school? How did the students react?

NAR: They were scared. Everyone – wanted to get out school and go home, like everyone else was. But the administrators were talking about, you know, if they had to evacuate then kids and people would be coming here and live in the school, and we'd have to help and stuff like that. And people thought about that, what they would do, have people come live with them.

INT: Maybe people coming in from other areas and evacuating?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Do you think the incident changed you in any lasting way?

NAR: Just about not being as naïve as, about things like that. I guess that's *[unintelligible]*.

INT: What jokes did you hear about radiation or Three Mile Island?

NAR: *[Laughs.]* I heard a good one. There's this guy that was, I think he was on 81, which is pretty far from Three Mile Island, and he was up by Erie, and he got caught speeding, and this guy said, this cop asked him, he goes, "well I'm trying to get away from the radiation", the distance... but still, I thought it was pretty funny. I think I heard that on TV or something.

INT: Wow. He was trying to get away from radiation, it was like some big monster coming after you then.

NAR: An excuse for speeding. *[Laughing.]*

INT: I wonder if they did get anything like that. I wouldn't be surprised.

NAR: I wouldn't either. I think I'd say it *[laughing]*.

INT: Anything to get out of a ticket. *[Both laugh.]* When did you hear that one?

NAR: It was just like, a few days after it first started. *[Laughs.]* It was funny.

INT: Do you remember what show it was on?

NAR: It was on the news.

INT: Oh, the news.

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you hear anyone passing it around school?

NAR: No. I think I said it to a few people.

INT: Why do you think people were telling jokes?

NAR: Because they didn't know how else to deal with it I guess. Everyone, if something's bugging you, just laugh it off.

INT: So its sort of a tension release then?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you see any posters or graffiti on it?

NAR: No, just shirts, that's all. My brother has one, "I Survived Three Mile Island."

INT: Yeah. Did you get one?

NAR: No, I don't know.

INT: Why do you think people wear them?

NAR: I don't know. I wonder. *[INT laughs.]* I wouldn't.

INT: Do you remember any joking from other crises, like Guyana, just for example or Jonestown?

NAR: No, I haven't. I guess because that wasn't – you know, it wasn't *right here*. Right with us and we didn't, I guess.

INT: So that was more of a news event whereas this was a personal...?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to say?

NAR: Well, I said about the nuclear, the people that are against it, and I think that's all. I feel strongly about that though, about people not giving it a chance.

INT: It's sort of like they've gotten burned once and they don't see the benefits of fire.