

Date: May 23, 1979

Occupation: High school student

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

NARRATOR: I was sitting in school, and they had mentioned it, and said that none of the students were supposed to go outside.

INT: So, was it the faculty then, or the administration?

NAR: It was just like a rumor that floated around.

INT: Okay. So it must be students then, just... or seemed to...

NAR: Well, they heard on the radio, in the crafts room, so like it just floated from one person to the next.

INT: Did it scare you?

NAR: Not really, no *[laughing]*.

INT: What did you think about?

NAR: Well, first thing is I thought, "well I hope they can control it", which I knew they could, and I realized that if it was any really major danger we wouldn't still be in school so I just kinda left it go.

INT: Did you think it became a serious condition later on?

NAR: No, it wasn't really serious until they had said about the air bubble, you know. We talked about it in Chemistry class, about, you know, how this could react and how it could have a meltdown. But as long as they had controlled it didn't really worry me.

INT: Did you seek out more information when you first heard about it? Did you try to find out more about it? Or did it just sort of pass you by?

NAR: I just kept in touch with it, and listened to the news and read the newspapers, but – I haven't really gone out, you know, really out to find out what really – what *could* have happened if it was, and et cetera. Because I feel, you know, they would have told us what to do, where to go, and et cetera.

INT: Who is "they"?

NAR: Oh, the government.

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

NAR: Yes. *[Laughs.]* My mother wasn't too worried about it. None of us were, but we took precautionary steps, and we, like, called our aunt, which, she lives up in Juniata County. And we had told her about the situation, she said yes... and so, you know, there was a place for us to go, it wasn't like we were just going to be stranded.

INT: So you were ready.

NAR: Yeah.

INT: You were prepared to leave if it came to that.

NAR: Yeah, if it came to it, but – we weren't really all that excited. We went on working and doing our daily routine as we always did.

INT: So it didn't make any special changes in what you did?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: I think mainly they were kind of, they were excited. I know a lot of people were, because I had even friends that packed up and went away for a couple of days. And, I think the main problem during the whole thing was that no one really knew what radioactivity was, what it would do, and how much you could have before it could affect you. They just said "radioactivity" – and people's minds went crazy.

INT: Do you think the public didn't know what was going on, or do you think officials knew?

NAR: I think the officials really knew but the public themselves weren't, you know, educated enough in their science backgrounds to except this new idea of nuclear plants.

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

NAR: Well, I know it was exaggerated [*laughs*]. Very much; it was really blown out of proportion. Because friends had relatives overseas calling and asking them what was going on, and my boss at work, he had his mother from Washington calling up and asking him if he was still alive. You know. I think in Pennsylvania itself it was kept under control, but as it went farther out overseas and through the U.S. it got exaggerated.

INT: But you felt the way that the Harrisburg media, they were handling it all right.

NAR: Right. Yes.

INT: Did you listen to any particular station or channel?

NAR: No.

INT: Or any particular newspaper?

NAR: No.

INT: Was there anyone that you trusted more than anyone else?

NAR: Not really. I kinda summed up what one person would say and what another one person would say, and kinda, you know, combined it. I didn't take it from one standpoint. It was from a multitude.

INT: Did you feel that the government, or Met Ed, or the media, that anyone was more reliable than another?

NAR: Probably the government and media were more reliable than what Met Ed was. Because they had accidents before that they really never reported. which they should've. But I think probably your government and your media, definitely always your media probably, in your local area and the direct area, probably will have it more... information.

INT: So you trust their scoop on what was going on.

NAR: Right. Right.

INT: So when did you start thinking, you said you started to think about leaving the area, you know, just-in-case, you called up your aunt. When was that?

NAR: We called her up when the hydrogen bubble... they thought, that was to be growing. That when we called up. But really, we were just over at my aunt's then that coming weekend too, so All of it was just kind of like calling her up and seeing if it was okay to come over and then we had gotten on the subject. So.

INT: So, you had just been over there, when were you...?

NAR: Well see, the week that this had happened, we were thinking about going over the next weekend, so we had to call her up anyways, and so like, we just like got on the subject when we had called her.

INT: So you just sorta moved up your trip?

NAR: Right.

INT: The weekend.

INT: If you had left... Say they evacuated you. What sort of things would you have taken? What you have taken with you?

NAR: Probably my pets for one. *[Both laugh.]*

INT: What sort of pets do you have?

NAR: I have a cat and a dog. I'd have to take them. And just my belongings – you know, just about a suitcase full of clothes and went, because I don't think it would have really gone that wild. So I would have expected to come back.

INT: Did you ever actually pack anything?

NAR: No, nothing.

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

NAR: Not really, no. Because I don't personally understand the build of the plant, and the chemistry and the logic that goes into it, so I kind of took the advice of my chemistry teacher and you know, the officials and the professors.

INT: And what were they saying?

NAR: They were saying it was safe. And that, you know, things would be okay as long as they could get things cooled down. So I didn't worry about it.

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

NAR: Not mine personally. For one thing we live upriver, so we don't have to worry about getting... if they dump water that was in the plant into the Susquehanna, that's where I'm concerned. I think it may affect the people downstream if they decide to dump it in. The Susquehanna, I know they dumped a little bit but if they continued to dump the rest of it in.

INT: Do you think the little bit that they dumped in affected people?

NAR: All's I can say to that, time will tell. Right now I have no idea. Because I don't know how much was dumped in.

INT: Yeah. What sorts of things would go wrong with the people? Say if it did affect them.

NAR:

If it did probably um... if any thing would show up it'd be probably cancer, and if they had dumped a large enough quantity in, probably be cancer and probably maybe defects in birth.

INT: Any particular kind of cancer?

NAR: I'm not sure really.

INT: Just general over all. Your everyday cancer. ...What other aspects of life might have been affected?

NAR: Well, definitely the aquatic life down there in the river would be affected by it.

INT: What do you think would have happened to it?

NAR: The fish and stuff, I don't know what exactly radiation does to it, but it may have affected, you know, the fish that are in – Maybe they wouldn't breed as good, you know, things would be stunted almost.

INT: Do you think they would have died?

NAR: I don't think they would have *died*. Probably they would have just stopped reproducing. That's about it.

INT: If the worst had occurred what do you think might have happened? The very worst you can imagine?

NAR: The worst I could imagine... hmm. The worst I can think of... is, where was it, in Russia or something that a total city wiped out because of radiation of someplace. Yeah, so that'd probably be it.

INT: So you think this whole area would have been wiped out?

NAR: Yeah, about twenty miles – about a twenty-mile radius probably would. And then –

INT: Was it the radiation or the explosion?

INT: It was probably a combination, I'd say. It probably wiped it... but that's... My teacher told me about that. He read in a magazine.

NAR: Makes you feel good. [*Both laugh.*] Thank you! I needed that.

INT: Yeah, um, he said it was kept under cover for such a long time and it was just, you know, uncovered. But that would probably be the worst, we'd probably have to evacuate the area for, x amount of years, and then have it all covered over, and then we'd be old by whenever the time was – you know, up.

INT: So what do think the area would be like?

NAR: Well, probably almost dead, like, almost like a desert, probably. You know, not really dry but just probably nothing really; life forms.

INT: All plant life?

NAR: I'm not sure if all plant life would be dead. I don't know if the radiation would really affect the plants but I know it would affect the animals.

INT: Did you picture in your mind any other affects of radiation on life around you? Just radiation in general?

NAR: No. Because I know I take in radiation in every day, you know from the sun, and so... no, I really don't.

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

NAR: Pretty much so, yes.

INT: Throughout the whole affair?

NAR: Well... yes... They were, because if they weren't really in control, you know, or didn't know what they were doing, they would have had an automatic panic through the whole area. I mean, it would be totally wild, so I think they handled it very well.

INT: Do you think they would have evacuated people if they weren't in control of the situation?

NAR: Yes, definitely.

INT: What reassured you that they were? That they were in control? Just that they were so calm about it or...?

NAR: Well, that and the scientific information, that they could back up their evidence that it was going to be okay. I mean, they were keeping a watch on it every minute of the hour. They were really keeping a really close watch on it... They had all these, they had developed plans, to, you know, evacuate if it was necessary.

INT: Do you feel they are in control of the situation now?

NAR: Yes, I feel they are, except for Met Ed not knowing what to do with the water, is about the only thing that now concerns me. I know that we're gonna have to have to resort to some other source of energy and, you know, I don't condemn them for trying to use a nuclear plant, because – we have to learn. We learn from our mistakes.

INT: So do you think they're gonna wipe out all nuclear plants now?

NAR: No, I think they'll probably just... It's a reinforcement really.

INT: How so?

NAR: Because they know what goes wrong, and they can correct it now. You know, they see this mistake, and they can...

INT: Okay. So it's more like they'll correct this mistake other plants. And improve them on the basis of what happened here.

NAR: Well, they should. *[Both laugh.]* Put it that way, but, yeah.

INT: Are you against nuclear power, or are you for it?

NAR: I'm – well I guess I can say that I'm really I guess for it, because – We gotta have something. We have to learn, we have to find another way for energy. And right now nuclear energy is the only other resource we can turn, not unless somebody develops another one. Because we're definitely running out of oil and all of our other ways of energy, so why not try something new?

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

NAR: Oh, definitely. Yes.

INT: And how did he figure in it?

NAR: I just said to him, you know, “hey, what's gonna happen, it's your will.” You know, “what happens is the way you want it to be.” So I had total faith in him. So I really didn't worry at all.

INT: Did you pray at all?

NAR: Oh, I do every night. *[Laughs.]*

INT: So it was an important part of calming you down then?

NAR: Yes, not really myself, but the people around me.

INT: How – wait, what do you mean?

NAR: The people around me. You pray for other people, you know, to help calm them down, really, and you know, when you have such a strong faith in yourself it reflects onto other people, and other people can gain that faith too. So it kinda, you know, rubs off on another person. So if you're strong, they're strong.

INT: Did you think that God caused the incident to happen?

NAR: That I don't know. I know that what is done in the world is not all... It's put there for a reason, I guess you could say in a way, maybe it was him, maybe it wasn't; I'm not that sure about it, because I don't know his will *[laughing]*. But he probably put it there for a reason, like all things are, to maybe – tell us something, or bring us back to him.

INT: Do you know what he would have been trying to tell the people?

NAR: I have no idea, no. Maybe he was just trying to join hands and bring us all together, again, for the day when, you know, really a bad catastrophe like that would happen, or any other catastrophe that could happen.

INT: So it's sort of a preparation-type thing?

NAR: You could say that, yes.

INT: Have you used the name, or thought about, Jesus, Mary, or another religious figure during the problem? Or did you go more directly to God?

NAR: Well, I kinda used God and Jesus together, you know. I prayed through the name of Jesus Christ, but, you know, more or less *to* God.

INT: So he's sort of the intermediary, who you step through.

NAR: Right.

INT: Did your faith in God play a more important role during any particular aspect of the TMI thing? Like was your faith affected by it, did it become stronger at all, because of what was going on?

NAR: Well, mainly it was when they evacuated the five-mile area. And, you know, the pregnant women and the children. People were really beginning to get panicky when they started evacuating them. And I just, you know, hoped and prayed that those people would be fine, and you know – physically and mentally. So that's the point where really it became really strong.

INT: Yeah, that's where it started being a real issue for you.

NAR: Right.

INT: Did any biblical stories, or events, or sayings, or cross your mind?

NAR: Yeah, the walls of Jericho, when they come tumbling down. Yes, that did. And the time God burned the one city.

INT: Which...?

NAR: That was when... ah, wow. *[Both laugh.]*

INT: I'm trying to pick it up in my mind too.

NAR: When it was the city of evil, and he had taken – I forget who it was, this man went and got his wife and his daughter and told them not to look back; and his wife looked back, she was killed for looking back, but he had to keep on going. You know, it's almost like, we have to – forget. Not really forget, but not dwell so much on things that happen in the past, but to pick up, to make them better and keep on going.

INT: So is that how you drew it into the Three Mile Island thing?

NAR: Right.

INT: That you can't look back on past mistakes?

NAR: Well you look back on the mistakes, you learn from them. But you can't let them bring you down, you gotta keep on going.

INT: And how about the walls of Jericho, how did that tie in?

NAR: Well, it just seems like people, some people around there – you know, everything just – just tumbled down for them, you know, they were totally crushed by this happening and they got *really* upset, they got... And it just reminded me the way these people were just almost like falling over. You know, it just reminded me of it, but I don't know why.

INT: Did you think anything about the Last Judgment?

NAR: No. No, I didn't at all.

INT: Some people had brought that up, so...

NAR: No, not at all.

INT: Did the idea of Satan or the end of the world enter into your thinking or feeling?

NAR: No, not really, because I knew myself that I would get through it, and if I didn't that was the will of God. You know, I just kept my faith and I didn't worry about Satan really, myself.

INT: Do you think he could have had a play in other people's reactions?

NAR: Probably, yes. *[Laughs.]*

INT: Like when they were starting to panic, and whatnot?

INT: Right. Well, not really panicking, but cutting down and – you know, protesting, and really having a fit about what was going on, like they went down to Washington and were protesting about nuclear plants, and that they should ban all nuclear. I think that's wrong to say, you know, hey, forget this. First you gotta have evidence to back it up. Very strict evidence.

INT: Did you think about your own death?

NAR: No. *[Laughs.]*

INT: Did you think about... um... Did you attend a religious service during the crisis?

NAR: Just regular Sunday church services, that's all.

INT: And where was that?

NAR: MacCallister United Methodist.

INT: Did anyone speak about TMI?

NAR: On the one sermon he did. He said... you know, it was just touched on briefly. That was that people had to keep their faith and keep calm. And that's about all that he had said.

INT: Did it make you feel any better afterwards? That he had mentioned it?

NAR: I guess it did, yes, because I knew him and other people were thinking along the same basis as I was.

INT: Did any ethical or religious codes of behavior guide your actions during the crisis?

NAR: Just to keep strong and keep your faith, but that's about it. *[Laughs.]*

INT: What does your own faith say about the rightness or wrongness of man's desire to use and control atomic power?

NAR: I don't really...

INT: Does it have any bearing?

NAR: No, I do not believe. No.

INT: Do you think religious persons or institutions should take any public stand, either for or against human development and the use of atomic power?

NAR: No, not really. It's really – it's up to the individual, because that would even start a feud, even within a small church like the Methodist church, because if the church itself or even a – if you would say, well, McAllister United States is for nuclear plants, I mean totally right there in the church you're gonna ask for a battle. You know. So really I

think if you want to take a stand, take a stand by yourself and support your idea. Don't really speak for other people, let them speak for themselves.

INT: Okay, back to this part...At the time, did this event bring to mind any past experiences or past events?

NAR: When Agnes hit, yes, that's about the only time. When people started panicking, and were worried about being flooded out. But that's about the only one.

INT: Did anything like this happen to you before, or in history?

NAR: Not to me, no.

INT: Not to you personally. Did you think about any historical events?

NAR: Just the one my teacher had spoke about.

INT: Was that the Russian one?

NAR: Yeah, something like that over there in Russia.

INT: At the time, did you have any daydreams that you can remember?

NAR: No. *[Laughs.]*

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams?

NAR: Not really.

INT: Did it disturb your sleep at all – thinking about it.

NAR: No, it didn't. *[Laughs.]*

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

NAR: Just on, I think it was, Saturday Night Live or some TV show had taken the event that happened down at TMI, and put it in like a comic, but – it was the Coke syndrome, or something like that, it was called? It was just like a little clipping. That's the only one that really came to my mind, just because, you know....

INT: And it was a direct play-off?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs? Did anything go over and over in your mind?

NAR: No.

INT: What changes happened to the people around you? You said a lot of people became panicky?

NAR: Right. I think right now that people have gained more confidence in the government, and what have you, because they saw that – you know, nothing tragically has happened, and that, you know it is worth believing your government, because they're not gonna let a whole state die out, or something, or even Central Pennsylvania die out, because of a nuclear accident like this. They're gonna evacuate first.

INT: Do you think the people felt that during the crisis?

NAR: Some did, some didn't.

INT: But you think the majority now have been changed so that they do trust more?

NAR: Right.

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

NAR: None so far. Except for that TV show, that's about the only one.

INT: Did you see any posters or graffiti?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you hear any new words or funny remarks?

NAR: *[Pauses.]* None that I know of.

INT: What do you think of the people wearing the T-shirts? Have you seen any of them?

NAR: Yes, I think they're cute. *[Both laugh.]* Um... it kinda almost like, influences the people, "hey, I was there, I lived through it." You know – they're not gonna let you die there. Trust nuclear power, you know. If something really tragically goes wrong they're not gonna keep on using it, but if they can correct what they have done wrong... I feel it's fine to use it.

INT: Do you remember any joking from other crises?—say Guyana or Jonestown, something along that?

NAR: No, not really.

INT: Is there anything else that you want to say? Anything I haven't brought out or that you've thought of and maybe I've started talking too quick?

NAR: No.