

Date: 1979

Occupation: Newspaper staff member

INTERVIEWER: She first heard about the incident, the Three Mile Island incident, from the News Room and she knew that the reactor was there beforehand. When I asked her about her family data — she was living at home with her parents and she immediately started talking about how her family reacted to the incident and she went on to speak about God and how it was God's way of warning us that even though nuclear energy was good and that it was necessary, we were progressing too quickly, or something to that effect. And it was just a warning from God that tells us to slow down a little because we can't control everything that nuclear energy does. I immediately went to the questions on the religion since she was going on that track and she didn't think of really any biblical stories and she didn't think it was Satan or the last judgment or the end of the world. None of this entered her mind. She didn't think it was God disciplining us, it was just God's warning again that we're progressing too quickly, and that we should slow down and find out what's going on really with all this nuclear power that we have. She attends church regularly, a Methodist church, and she didn't notice if there were more or fewer people there. She just said that it was about the same attendance. The service didn't change her feelings. The minister didn't really speak about TMI and she doesn't think that religious persons or institutions should take a public stand on the atomic power. She talked about the incident mainly with co-workers on the first day that it happened when she first heard about it. And she thought that some people were reacting kind of strongly but most everybody remained pretty calm. She mostly watched TV with her family at the end of the day or when the family got together and they did pay more attention to the news than usual. She felt the media handled the situation fairly well. She didn't think that it was the government. She didn't think that the government had that much to do with it. It wasn't their fault or it wasn't that she didn't take it as anybody's fault, the accident at TMI. She again just took everything back to God saying that it was His warning to us.

INT: So unlike the rest of the people I interviewed, she had nothing bad to say about Met Ed at all. She didn't have a bad word to say about anything. I think she trusted Dr. Denton, or Howard—Mr. Denton, she trusted him more than anyone else I think and there was nobody that she mistrusted. She felt that those in charge of the situation were controlling it as much as they could but again it was basically, it wasn't that much in human power. Because it was kind of an act of God then. An interesting thing that she said was that God didn't let it go far enough to create a real disaster. He stopped it just before real disasters struck such as a meltdown or something like that. He allowed the people in charge to gain control of the situation and save everyone from this disaster. She was going to leave home with her family, but they didn't because they stayed through the weekend and they were going to leave Monday night. But it turns out that they didn't really have to because by Monday night, things had cooled down. If she had left, though, she would have taken personal possessions such as photos and heirlooms and stuff that could not have been replaced. She didn't really think that anything that happened at TMI had affected her health either now or in the future. But of course no one can really tell. She wasn't really concerned about the food or the milk from the area. She didn't think of her own death or that of others. She knew she would survive because, I guess, God had reassured her. Her responsibilities that she felt during the incident were to her family

mainly so there weren't really any conflicts. Working at the newspaper, naturally her job was affected by probably having more work and just being overloaded with work there was a lot of tension going on. She believed that it would be best naturally to behave in a calm way in this situation, and she tried to behave this way and she didn't have any difficulty doing it.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was going on at Three Mile Island?

NARRATOR: It was really too technical for me to understand. When Dr. Denton would come out and then they would explain, there was groups of people working with him, whenever they would explain and they drew the pictures of where the problem was and they had the whole internal system of the thing on the board, then you could follow it. But even now I can't remember it. I know they had like pipes to take water and there was a containment building and all this stuff was going on but now even to look back on it I can't remember all the things that they did show us. But at the time whenever they came on you could see where their problem was and with the hydrogen bubble, I remember that was really a big worry to me. I thought, "Gee whiz, if they could just get rid of that," and that seemed to be, I think it was more than one. Other ones that had formed or something and there was a huge one in some area that was really causing them a lot of worry and I thought, "Well gee," you know, that was a pretty good way to look at it because, especially for me. I need to see something before I understand how it works, and when the diagram was shown on TV it was almost like a cross section of everything that was happening. It was easier to picture everything. And then we think "I wonder how the bubble is doing now. Did it get bigger or did it get smaller?" Whatever.

INT: Do you think anything that happened at TMI had any effect on your health; either now or in the future?

NAR: I don't think so. It's hard to know because there is still some, I guess, radioactive gas or something being let out into the atmosphere and then they were taking some waste away and you don't know what might have escaped and that there is a chance we might eventually have a cancer from it, but then on the other hand, we're eating things everyday that we don't know what they're made out of or what might have gone into them to preserve them or make them look pretty or to keep them soft or whatever. Just bred in that case. Whatever they might have injected into these things, whatever they are putting into animals and whatever they are putting in fields to fertilize crops in the first place, so I don't think we run a bigger risk of TMI problems than we do from any other things that are going on right now as far as chemicals and everything that are used to preserve and grow everything else. Everything imaginable they have some kind of chemical that can do it better than just letting nature take its course. It's hard to say but maybe they can pinpoint something directly to TMI, but I think that would be very difficult now because of all the things that are going on and all the drugs and things that are out in the market and additives and all this kind of thing. So, it's hard to say how it's going to affect people. I don't feel that I have suffered anything from it. Then again, it's hard to say.

INT: Did you think this was more frightening than say a hurricane or a flood or a war?

NAR: I think it was, because hurricanes and floods you know eventually because of nature will subside and if this TMI . . . If that thing would have exploded and there would have really been a problem, it wouldn't have been just been over with in a month or even

a year. It might have taken years to get over it because of the contamination that would have been involved with it. Even wars, they are horrible while they are happening and so many people are killed and everything and maybe we wouldn't have had a great a loss of people as what we would have if we would have had a war. And if we would have a war today, I'm sure there is no comparison. The loss would be enormous. But I think it was more frightening because you knew there was nothing that anybody could do to stop it. Even a flood, there is no way to stop water. It has to reach its own level but eventually it will. This one, even after the major disaster was over, the after-effects and the time that anybody could even come back into the area would have taken so long. At least in my mind, if the problem was as great as I think it is or was and the disaster that I have in my mind, if it would have happened the way I think it would have that the whole area would have been destroyed for a number of years and that's why I think it was worse than any natural disaster that we might have or any war.

INT: Okay. Did you hear any jokes during this?

NAR: Just something about the nukes and the T-shirts that were coming out now with some things like "I'm a Nuke" or "I Glow in the Dark" and things like that. And really, probably some people would say it was distasteful—is that the word, untasteful?

INT: Distasteful.

NAR: But it was a way I think of breaking the pressure that everybody was under. You have to crack a joke in a situation like that or the intensity of the problem can really get a person down so I don't think it was so bad to have a T-shirt saying that "I Glow in the Dark." We'd check people out when they came back to the office because a lot of our people had to go to Harrisburg for ads and everything and then we'd tell them, well, if you glow in the dark tonight, don't bother coming in tomorrow. It wasn't poking fun or it wasn't meant to anyway. I mean, it was just a way to lessen the tension and try to keep a sane mind through all of this. Because again, you didn't know what you'd have to do if you really have to leave, would you have to stay, would you have time to go, if you did decide to leave, which direction would you head so there was an awful lot of things going on in people's minds and this little bit of levity helped ease the tension and particularly seeing so many people right in the area around Goldsborough and Middletown who stayed there and was working together and helping each other out, the . . . I forget where that huge place was, whether it was the Hershey Arena or the Farm Show Building that opened up to take so many people in and to see people working together like that and helping each other out and they weren't that far away. The Farm Show building isn't that far away from the area; if they had to leave they would have had left from there too probably, but I don't think it was so bad on anybody's part to make light of some of the situations. Everybody knew how serious it was and a joke wasn't going to make it any less serious. It was going to take away some of the tension that people were under.

INT: Did you laugh at these jokes?

NAR: Yeah, I thought they were funny. I still think they were funny. Now if something really serious would have happened, it would have been a reminder that maybe, you know, we should have looked at it more seriously, but we all had our serious moments at this time and for some of the things that happened I thought it was funny, There were some things that maybe were kind of nasty like the letters that were written to my mother

and the book club. They weren't addressed particularly to her but the area in general. I don't think that was necessary. Someone taking a stand and saying "Don't send us anymore of your contaminated books" was a whole lot worse than saying "I Glow in the Dark." So putting things in perspective I think it was a lot better to try to be, to look at it with a little bit of humor and try to relieve some of the tensions that a lot of other people were under than it was to keep everything so black and gloomy. I don't think that was the way to look at it at all.

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

NAR: Well, hearing about The China Syndrome at that time, it seemed so much like a coincidence. You thought at first that it might have been a publicity stunt that things weren't really so bad off as it seemed, because maybe this was a good way to get it in and then Orson Well's War of the Worlds came into mind when he really scared the daylights out of people, I think it was New Jersey. They were really under some kind of horrible notion that the Martians were attacking and killing people and all this stuff is going on so that came to mind but... And then the other disaster movies too; I thought of them quite a bit. Oh... The Earthquake one in California that they'd done. I forget was it Los Angeles or what city was destroyed in California. Earthquake, that was just the name of the movie: Earthquake.

INT: Earthquake, right.

NAR: And then mostly I thought of that one because their people were losing everything too. It wasn't like The Poseidon Adventure or The Towering Inferno which dealt with one building or one ship or something. It dealt a whole area of people and... That, I thought about those things. But other than, I hadn't read any books that really brought to my attention or had given me clue that something like this could really happen for real, but whenever you started thinking about these things and comparing it with movies or stories that you'd read, I thought of the War of the Worlds I think first of all then Earthquake too as a disaster movie and I thought if they wouldn't have made a movie already they probably would have now. It would have been a tremendous box office draw and I think China Syndrome's timing was right on the button.

INT: Were you singing any songs during the time?

NAR: I don't think we really did. We had our hymns in church but around home normally we're singing our-- well, we watch Lawrence Welke and we can enjoy maybe during that time on Saturday night we might have broken down a little to clap or sing along with him, but it was a subdued weekend and it stayed that way until we finally felt that... I think it was Monday night. Sunday, we were planning on what we were going to do, if we were going to leave or not. Then till Monday night we felt... we were really definitely going to pack Monday. Because my mother really felt bad about it and we felt maybe we did wait too long and maybe we're not right to just wait and see. So Monday night we were going to definitely pack and then that's when things started to go better for us and so we thought we made it through this one okay but it was so subdued, you didn't think about it. All consumed, you really didn't have to think about it, all of your thinking time; you really didn't have to concentrate on your work or what you were doing around home or whatever. . Your thoughts went right away to this thing. It was just, you were totally involved in what was going on over there and you really didn't feel that cheerful. I

think that's why if anyone did crack a joke about it, it really made you feel better and release a tension, because it was like a weight had been lifted for just a moment anyway, but it wasn't... I don't remember thinking at all happy about anything. If anything would happen that was funny I would have an instant reaction to it and right away it went back to TMI. Thoughts would just not leave from the people over there and the problem that we were living through.

INT: Did you have any daydreams?

NAR: I think as far as fantasizing, it was, "Well, what are you going to do now? If you lose everything in Carlisle, if you have to go look for another job, what will you do again, will you go into the same kind of work or where will you end up if you have to get on a road and just go and where will you be and will you stay where you land or will you try to get back home or what are you going to do. So mainly if we were thinking about anything at all of the future, I think it was what will we do next? If something happens that we can't continue our lifestyle that we've become accustomed, what will happen if we have to leave, what will we do?" And so, it began to be a part of the daydreams where if, well, we have to go someplace else, we'll have to get work and find a place to stay and you started thinking how are you going to continue on with everything you had is behind now. There's no turning back. That was the only thing. I can't get over the feeling that everything was so gloomy and so sad and subdued there that it was just, it was an experience that I'll never forget and I wasn't even there in the mainstream of it, but just hearing about it and trying to make plans on what you'd have to do if your future here was destroyed, what would do. It was really something. It was an obsession, it really got to be an obsession with you, because you wake up and the first thing was on your mind was what's going on over there and when you went to bed you thought it's pretty bad over there so it was continual. The first thing up in the morning and the last thing at night and while you were eating, the whole day; just totally immersed in TMI.

INT: Did you have any trouble sleeping?

NAR: Not really. I don't know if my mother might have been upset with it and my father didn't really say much about it at all. He's very calm. I guess age does that to a person. You become extra patient and extra calm about things. Nothing really upsets you. I think he felt terrible and I it really would have hurt him very much if we would have had to leave, but Mother may have lost some sleep over it, not getting to sleep worrying about the family — should she go to work, should she risk taking that trip over there in the first place — it's only like 13 miles one direction, but should she attempt to go or should she just stay around home and see what's going to happen. I stayed pretty good through it. I just had tremendous faith in God. Not saying that the other's in my family didn't, but I just felt that everything would be all right and in just a little bit more time, things would work out okay. On the other hand, if things don't work out things will have to go on from there and take whatever happens, but I've lost more sleep over my job or family problems than I would have over TMI, which is something that we had no control over.

INT: Did you have any dreams while you were sleeping?

NAR: I don't think so. Are you thinking of nightmares and things like that of disasters...?

INT: Yes.

NAR: I probably did, but sometimes you can remember a dream for years and years afterwards if you have one that really makes an impression on you and then nothing that happened to me at that time left that much of an impression on me. If I did dream, it would have been odd not to have dreamt about TMI because it was totally in your mind all the time. It was hard not to think about it, but I don't remember seeing myself being blown to pieces or contaminated or dying with radiation or lost from my family or anything. I just assumed that every thing would just eventually be okay.

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

NAR: No. I don't think so. I don't think that they ought to start it up again and I hear them talking about it on the news quite often and I know that it's costing a fortune to just let it lie idle, but I hope they don't get in too big of a hurry that they'll do something, oh what's the word, that they'll do something that they haven't thought through before they start again. To me this was a warning and they've got to be very, very careful as to how they proceed and I hope they have the knowledge and the technology and everything they need before they even start to get this thing back on its feet and going again. Other than that, it was an experience we lived through and I'm not going to say that I'd like it again. But having gone through it and having been a part of its history, why, it's all a part of this earth and the movement that we're in. As the world keeps turning and the world keeps progressing, these are the things that are going to happen. We missed the disaster this time. That's not to say that it's not going to happen in the future, but I hope the people that really are involved with this have benefited from TMI and not just write it off as an accident that they'll really go into it and make sure that they've got the problem under control if they ever try to get it going again. There are a lot of groups and my brother was very much against TMI ever opening again. We know that probably nuclear energy is one of the definite possibilities that they are going to have in the future but I hope they really take their time before they get into it again. Other than that, I don't have any blame to place on anybody. I can't say that somebody was wrong. They just weren't careful enough and I think it's good and I think we will be able to benefit from it if they take their time and proceed with caution and get it right next time and don't do this again. Don't do it again. (chuckles)