

Date: 1979

Occupation: Administrative assistant, clinical laboratory.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when you first heard about the Three Mile Island incident?

NARRATOR: The dates, no. I don't remember the day. *[unintelligible]*

INT: Do you remember the circumstances? Under which you first heard about it?

NAR: Yes, I think it was at work, someone said they were having a problem at TMI. Then of course the news casts or whatever.

INT: Right. Did you know there was a reactor there before the incident?

NAR: Yes. I've seen it many times when I go to the airport.

INT: And you recognize the cooling towers?

NAR: The stacks, sure.

INT: Did you know how far TMI was from here?

NAR: Approximately.

INT: What did you think about when you first heard about it, what was your initial reaction when you first heard about the incident?

NAR: I just figured it was a technical malfunction of some kind.

INT: Did you think that it was a serious situation at that time?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you seek out further information, did it seem worth finding out more about it at that time?

NAR: No, it did not.

INT: Did you talk to family or friends or people at the hospital about it?

NAR: To some degree, and of course at the hospital because of possible disaster. We were required to... Well we have a disaster plan committee, whatever, routine for any type of possible emergency, so that was discussed in detail.

INT: So that you met as soon as you heard about the incident?

NAR: No, the disaster committee did not meet, but, we would not meet under any circumstances. I mean, the plan is effective whenever it's needed, so there's no meeting ahead of time, otherwise it wouldn't – You don't plan disasters so therefore the plan is already in effect when the disaster happens.

INT: But there was discussion of it, was there a discussion of it among...?

NAR: No. Well, among the laboratory people in case, well, I'm primarily concerned with the laboratory people, where we could get people in if need be, or if there was an explosion or some kind of... Something other than radiation.

INT: Was there that kind of concern immediately when you heard there was a malfunction or did that come later?

NAR: No. No, that was later.

INT: At what point did you begin to perceive the crisis as a crisis? As a serious situation?

NAR: I didn't ever really conceive it as a serious crisis. It didn't occur to me that there would be even as much as the China explosions or release into the air.

INT: Did other people in the lab seem to – like they were feeling that it was a crisis?

NAR: Some, some felt that way.

INT: But were there other people also who never did see it as a serious crisis?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you follow the media sources on what was happening?

NAR: For a couple of days and then I got to thinkin'. And I ceased. In fact, I, a "news brief", so to speak, since I was five or six years old and in fact it is almost mandatory that I watch 6:30 ABC, then David Brinkley or whatever. And the TMI completely turned me off.

INT: Was there anything specific, can you elaborate a little bit on what it was about the media coverage that you found to be...?

NAR: I thought it was completely confusing. I don't believe that the newscasters were getting accurate information from whatever sources that they were using. So therefore, I didn't care to listen to it, because I felt most of it would be wrong.

INT: So you stopped listening to it after a couple of days?

NAR: Yes.

INT: How did you feel about the government's role in it, the government's handling, either on a state level or on the federal level?

NAR: Well, later, after the thing was over, I think that the governor did an outstanding job, a commendable job really. And also the president, by his physical visit there, to administrate whatever the danger was minimal.

INT: What about Met Ed's role in this?

NAR: I really haven't formed an opinion.

INT: Was there anyone, any source of information that you found particularly reliable or trustworthy? For your information at the time, either here or nationally?

NAR: Well, the nuclear, ahhh, I have no idea what his name was now. The man, that, uh...

INT: Denton?

NAR: Denton, the person in charge. I thought he was very good, very effective. And I relied on his information, for what information that I was interested in at that time. Which I really wasn't interested, because I think that people were going off the deep-end and they weren't... *[Short pause.]* It irritated me quite frankly, because they made so much of it. I don't really think that the so-called explosion or the so-called hydrogen bubble, I think that all those people, I think they had it much more under control than the general public realized.

INT: Or was led to believe?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Was there anyone that you particularly mistrusted? Any individual that you found...?

NAR: Not any individual.

INT: So I think that you've answered this, you felt the people in charge were in control of the situation?

NAR: Yes, I did.

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

NAR: Absolutely not.

INT: You didn't plan to, did you change any of your ordinary routines?

NAR: No, my only concern was not having the people at work here in the laboratory, get too upset and leave the area, because we had to maintain personnel seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. And as far as I know we only had one person frightened enough to leave the area.

INT: That's commendable, that everybody at the hospital kind of...decided to...

NAR: Yeah, there's no point in... Fortunately we only had, out of fifty-four involved, we only had one female leave the area. *[unclear]*

INT: So you didn't think at all about leaving the area?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any, this gets into subjective part of the interview, did you have any mental pictures of what was happening at TMI or what might happen, did anything flash into your mind?

NAR: No, and maybe I oughta explain. See, I have been involved with the Navy, I'm retired Navy, I spent over twenty years in the Navy. And we went through all sorts of nuclear drills, atomic explosion, decontamination process, and everything that could happen with a nuclear explosion. So, with that kind of background, I was not totally concerned, because I had some idea of what was going on. I mean, I think that I was better informed than the guy that works down at the courthouse doing deeds or whatever, so. That was one reason I guess that I was a little more calm than the rest of the population.

INT: Did you think at any time that anything that happened there might affect your health?

NAR: No.

INT: If anything, if the worst had happened, if there had been an explosion, did you have any images of what might have happened, did you have any worries about...

NAR: I didn't have any worries, assuming that a large amount of radiation leaked into the atmosphere, I would've been concerned. I wouldn't have gone out and taken an ear of corn off a stalk or anything like that.

INT: Did you have any concern about food or milk from the area as it was?

NAR: No. *If* there had been an explosion of course I would have.

INT: Did you think of your own death or the death of those around you being possible?

NAR: No.

INT: *[laughing]* I can tell the train of things but I have to ask these questions so that the interviews are comparable, I'm sorry.

NAR: That's okay, that's fine.

INT: So, I think I can answer this myself, the next one, did you think you would survive? *[Both laugh.]* Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: No. He didn't build TMI. *[Laughs.]*

INT: So that you didn't feel that he was responsible in any way for what happened?

NAR: No, God don't build automobiles either.

INT: Did you feel that you had particular responsibilities during the incident that were different from during normal times?

NAR: Yeah, I had a responsibility to, in case something did happen, I had a responsibility to the institution that I work for. I couldn't – it would've been felonious for a hospital staff to run to Washington or some place like that, abandon the area. I mean, my Navy background doesn't permit that. You go where you're needed. And since this hospital is geared to taking care of casualties, that's where I had to be.

INT: That's reassuring for the residents of Carlisle.

NAR: Well, I think most of the hospital staff feel that way.

INT: Did you feel any kind of conflict, say between responsibilities to your family and to the hospital?

NAR: No, if I thought my family was in danger, I would've sent them away and stayed myself.

INT: Was, as it turned out, was your job or work affected by the crisis?

NAR: Very little. *[Unintelligible.]*

INT: I think you've answered this one but let me get it on tape, okay... Did you have any ideas, ethical or moral ideas about the way to behave in a situation like this?

NAR: Well, *[unintelligible]*. You're not thinking very clear *[unintelligible]*. My job, my job is to stay and do whatever I can.

INT: Did, at the time did this event bring to mind any past experiences that you've had?

NAR: Oh, it brought back some of the nuclear drills that I had in the Navy. I mean it's almost instant recall, I mean that's the purpose of drills. You don't get drilled once, otherwise it wouldn't be a drill. *[Unintelligible]* repressed my memory of the previous...

INT: What, can I ask a little bit, I didn't know anything about the Navy drills, what sort of, what was the scenario for those drills, what would happen...?

NAR: Okay, well after the atomic bomb, in Nagasaki, wherever, we were in, quote, "the Nuclear Age", okay, if you're aboard ship, and there is the chance that you will be the target for nuclear explosion. Okay, you are at sea, on ship, the name of the game is survive, okay, so the ship is engineered to wash down itself with automatic washers and this and that... Clothing was available with gas, not gas, but effective breathing apparatus. We were taught how to decontaminate, rid the ship of radioactive contamination if you will. We were taught the alpha, beta, gamma particles and all the – some of the physics of nuclear reactors.

INT: It would be nice if we all had that kind of...

NAR: Some point thought it would scare the hell out of a lot of people.

INT: That's true too. Did you think that the incident was in general more or less frightening than something like a flood or a hurricane or other types of disasters?

NAR: It was more frightening because you can't see it. And most people don't understand it so, people are always afraid of things they don't understand. A flood is very simple, you can get to high ground. With nuclear radiation, high ground won't help you *[unintelligible]*.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Do you have any day dreams or sleeping dreams that...?

NAR: Not about this problem. *[Both laugh.]*

INT: I'm sure the others are interesting, but... *[unintelligible]* Did you find that people around you changed at all during the incident?

NAR: No, not really. Well, my thirteen-year-old daughter was more concerned, but she was at the age where, I don't think she was frightened but she would've been if it hadn't been for my reassurance.

INT: But she came to you?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Were there any jokes going around the hospital having to do with TMI or radiation or anything like that that you can remember?

NAR: Well, some, I don't recall any of them.

INT: You can't recall any of them?

NAR: No, they weren't that good.

INT: My husband is specifically interested in that because of the folk lore, there is a sort of a body of humor that grows at times of crisis?

NAR: I can't remember any.

INT: Did you have an opinion about nuclear energy before the incident and has this altered in any way?

NAR: Well, I didn't have an opinion about it and it hasn't altered any. I think nuclear power, if it was geared up years ago from nuclear power, and we set up a good program, with the highest technical capabilities that we are capable of doing. And if the plants and manufacturers, and the specifications of the NRC or whoever sets the specifications, uh we wouldn't be having a gasoline shortage, or *[unintelligible]*. If we could supply the sixty percent or whatever of the nuclear, I mean the electrical power with nuclear. And I still think that's the route to go. I remember, I have a friend who was in the Navy with me, and he retired from the Navy and he worked in a magazine down in South Carolina. And he was one of the most *[unintelligible]* nuclear technology program because he was on a nuclear sub. Anyway he worked at the nuclear plant in and there were many many violations of the safety regs, and some of the simple jobs, the simple welding, you know, welding pipes together or whatever, a lot of those things were not done properly. And the idea is to build something, build it well and it'll work. But if you build something and you build it sloppy it's going to work for a while. It's just like buying a house. If you build, you buy a good well-made house, it will last for hundreds of years. If you buy some crazy thing put up with green wood it might be repairing it forever, the same idea.

INT: Do you think there's somehow more carelessness about reactors or simply because we're dealing with a more dangerous...?

NAR: No, I just think it's sloppy workmanship.

INT: Do you think that the government could, that more increased government regulation and inspection could solve...?

NAR: Inspections, yes, by responsible people. A lot of government inspectors are inspectors are in name only. You know you've got politics involved, I'll pass you if you'll do this for me, this kind of thing. I'm not saying kickbacks or whatever, but sort of that's possible too. Like, people that build bridges, they use that standard type of concrete. Okay, so they might collapse, but by that time, you know, the contractors are out building another bridge, and the same thing goes on in nuclear plants.

INT: Seems like it anyway. Is there anything else... That concludes our part of the survey, the questions, but is there anything else that you'd like to say either about the incident or about the hospital's response to it or anything you think of?

INT: No, I think the hospital [*unintelligible*] anything we were called on to do we did, you know, we were ready to stand by in case of [*unintelligible*] we're not really geared up for cases of contamination. But, well, when we were aboard the ships when we had nuclear drills, we weren't geared up for it either. We played games where the goal was to go to the showers, decontamination – we were [*unintelligible*], the Communists may go ahead. We were in Japan. [?] But really, you know, the chances of having a nuclear war nowadays is very slim. So it was...

NAR: Was it part of the original disaster plan; are there provisions in the disaster plan to handle nuclear incidents?

INT: It was in the process of being written by one of the radiologists at the time it happened. The plan was not actually on paper for nuclear accidents or whatever, but it was in the hands of a radiologist to be written when this thing occurred.

NAR: Was that because of the proximity of TMI?

INT: No, it was just in general.

NAR: Do you suppose that, would I be able to talk with the person who drafted that plan?

INT: Sure, Dr. Pearlman. P-E-A-R-L-M-A-N.

NAR: Yeah, I think I have him on my list. So he would be the one to talk to about the plan?

INT: Right, he's the one that's drawing, well he's the one that's qualified to do it. He is a quote, "nuclear safety officer" for the hospital, because of his training in nuclear medicine, etc.



