

Date: August 23, 1979

Occupation: Secretary

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

NARRATOR: I would say television as it was happening. Probably the evening of the first day of the problem, I would assume.

INT: So it was probably television?

NNAR: I would think so, yes.

INT: What makes you think that? Did you watch it more often?

NNAR: Usually I'd turn it on for the news as soon as I'd get home from work and I really don't remember exactly but I would think that this was probably my biggest source of information.

INT: Were you following any particular sources of information?

NAR: You mean on television?

INT: Yeah, or anything?

NAR: Mainly I was following what my husband and my son said because they are both on police forces and both of them were involved in the area and both of them were all but predominantly on Three Mile Island off and on at all times during this event.

INT: So you were pretty much into the media?

NAR: Well, I listened to the news, but then I asked them how they felt because some of the things are given publicly and sometimes some things are not given publicly you know.

INT: Did you think it was a serious situation?

NAR: Yes, I did.

INT: From the very beginning?

NAR: Yes, I did.

INT: What made you believe that?

NAR: Because I think we really don't take the complete import of the nuclear thing into our lives. I think it's rather new to the average layman and I really don't think that we think about it enough maybe. You know and I think that this probably could be a holocaust type of thing if it happened unexpectedly or it had gone further or the controls or the people with the know-how were not there.

INT: Did you start thinking of things like that? Like the holocaust during the incident?

NAR: No, but it was in the background of my mind. I mean there was always the possibility. I think most people were aware that it could go from one extreme or the other.

INT: So you are paying more attention to the media?

NAR: Well, yes. Television was my biggest source, because the newspapers usually in our area were getting it after we've heard the news on television.

INT: So you were listening to them more than you usually would?

NAR: No. I would say the average amount.

INT: Did you know that the reactor was there when the incident occurred?

NAR: Oh yes!

INT: How did you know that?

NAR: Well, I had visited my son and he lives in Middletown, and he is just less than a mile away from it so, and with my husband working at that time in the Harrisburg area, I've always been aware of this.

INT: So you knew how far away it was?

NAR: Right and they have been off and on the Three Mile Island in their work so I've been made aware of it simply by their availability to it.

INT: At first, what did you start thinking about? When you first heard about it?

NAR: Nothing more than not to panic, I think. I think it is a very necessary thing in our lifestyle today. I think this type of energy is here to stay. I think we need this.

INT: So did you start seeking out further information right after the beginning or did you just...?

NAR: Not more than what I had already read, no.

INT: Did you talk about the incident with friends or family?

NAR: Other than in passing, I don't think a great deal. Other than to inquire from my family that were really actively involved with what was going on.

INT: How about your co-workers here?

NAR: It was a daily conversation at least in passing if not more.

INT: Do you think you think about it more here at school than you did at home?

NAR: About an equal amount, I would say.

INT: Did you later think that it wasn't as serious as you may have thought it was?

NAR: No, I don't think so. I always thought it was something we should take seriously.

INT: So when you talked to your friends did you talk about it in that way or what kind of things did you talk about?

NAR: We talked about the possibility of not containing it and not being able to contain it. The physical problems that may happen say twenty years from now. Mainly, this was my interest, the people who were exposed to it, but this was more of a personal interest simply because of my family exposure and I'm still concerned about this even though all the counters they carry at no time went up to the maximum level, I still have concern for this and I think most people who were in that are at that time do.

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

NAR: I thought some of them responded very well and I thought some people panicked. Basically, I think everyone had a rather mature attitude or most of the people that I spoke with.

INT: What did you think about the media's handling of the incident?

NAR: I think they did their best with all the confusion and things that were happening. In fact, I think they covered it very well. Well, they were really working at a disadvantage because a lot of people didn't know people were giving out different statements. There was quite a confusion in the first few days in the information that was given until they sort of set up a command post and then they all got equal amounts and the same information, but in the beginning it was rather scattered.

INT: But you think in general they did a good job?

NAR: I think they did a very nice job, yes I do.

INT: How about the government officials?

NAR: I think they covered it, but do not think we got everything as it went on the spot. I think we did eventually and there is probably a very good reason for this. Sometimes panic is not the easiest way to handle a situation of that importance. But basically I think they did their best for everyone concerned under the circumstances because the plans were obviously not laid in a too defined manner prior to this so that everybody sort of went “Oh what do we do now?” But I think in general, everybody seemed to keep a cool attitude and do as well as they could under the circumstances as it rolled along they got it more organized.

INT: How about Met-Ed, how do you think they were handling the situation?

NAR: I didn't really care for the way they handled the situation at all.

INT: Was there somebody in particular who you mistrusted?

NAR: No, not really. I just felt that their stories changed so frequently within a short span of time that they quite obviously had changed their program, for the public. This may have been as understandable thing had you been there in all of it, but I felt that they did not start out being very honest.

INT: Was there anybody that you were following, that you particularly trusted, whose word you relied upon more than anyone else's?

NAR: Well, I listened more to Mr. Denton probably because of his station, you know his and job. But when you say trust, I don't know if I'd care to comment on that. That would be strictly a personal attitude. I really don't know what I think on that line.

INT: Did you feel that there was someone that you couldn't rely upon at all?

NAR: Well, I take the fifth, the same as the last question. That's related to really the same thing. I don't really know what I feel about trust or distrust because I don't know that much about the people nor the organization, etc.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Did you feel that way...

NAR: I feel they got that way as they went along, but I really don't think they were in the beginning.

INT: Did you feel that way during the incident or was that more as you reflect upon it?

NAR: No, I think that they didn't know at the time. I think they were researching and learning like everyone was because of this import there was not another accident like this before. So how could they possibly have everything defined? I don't think this would have been possible.

INT: How about now, do you think they know what they are doing now?

NAR: I think they are learning and I think developing better plans because of it, and I think people are taking a more active view, the people in general, the public, and I think that's good. It makes everybody more aware of his role and what happens if this should happen again.

INT: When the situation was occurring, were you worried?

NAR: Yes. Not panicked, but worried.

INT: What worried you the most?

NAR: The containment of the gases and water.

INT: You were afraid that they might not be able to contain it?

NAR: That's right.

INT: Were images going through your mind of the worst possible thing that could happen?

NAR: No, but it...now wait, when I say no, it crossed my mind, but I was not consumed by that idea.

INT: What did you think the worst would be?

NAR: That it would escape and we would all have an overdose of radiation.

INT: And how do you think people would have been affected by that?

NAR: Well, on the spot, probably not too much, but eventually radiation is illness caused by over exposure to radiation, and of course years ago I went to classes concerning this, Civil Defense classes so, I was very well aware of what the possibilities of the future illness or whatever went with this.

INT: So you started thinking of your civil defense training?

NAR: The possibility of it, yes, and what it could create, not now but in the future. Mostly with not my generation, but my children and their children even more, conception etc.

INT: How do you think it would have affected your health?

NAR: Unless I was right there possibly not a great deal at the moment, maybe if I was lucky enough live to live to a ripe old age, possibly then. Cancers and things of this nature.

INT: How about the environment, how do you think it would have affected that?

NAR: I think it would have affected every phase of our life, vegetation, living things of all sorts, had it been of a large amount of radiation. Mainly the gases because this goes into the atmosphere and affects more things.

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

NAR: Yes, I had some necessary things available in case of evacuation.

INT: What kinds of things did you get together?

NAR: Enough clothing to last me for a few weeks or a month and necessary medications-this type of thing. Necessary things.

INT: So you had packed these things?

NAR: Yes. We had been ready to go in case the word came.

INT: Did you think you would be coming back then?

NAR: Possibly. Mostly, yes, I was hoping that this, if this were so, that it would be of the amount that we could return in a period of time, say a few weeks.

INT: Did you continue to come to work here?

NAR: Oh yes.

INT: Were your ordinary routines here at work changed at all?

NAR: Not really no.

INT: How about at home?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you leave at all?

NAR: No.

INT: What made you stay?

NAR: My husband and my son were down there on Three Mile Island so I would hardly, I didn't feel that I really wanted to leave unless we were made to do so. In fact I volunteered my time here if at that time they were talking about setting up a Red Cross Station here in the Union if they evacuated the Carlisle Area and I volunteered my time rather than leave if it was necessary.

INT: What kinds of things were your son and your husband doing down on Three Mile Island?

NAR: My son is a policeman in Elizabethtown and lives in Middletown. Like I said less than a mile from the Island and my husband was in a supervisory capacity with the PA State Police in Harrisburg and did a number of escorting people on and off the Island and in his work routine was on and off the Island daily, so...if anyone got exposed to radiation, they did already. I felt that I would stay with them unless I was told to leave.

INT: Was there somebody who you were watching that would determine when you would leave? Or if you should leave?

NAR: No, I was waiting for a general announcement because if it already had escaped and was above the level that it should have been it wouldn't have really mattered too much if we left or if we didn't. That would be like the horse and the cart-which comes first?

INT: Did you have any kind of mental pictures of what was going on on the Island?

NAR: No, because I asked daily what was happening so I sort of had an exact picture of what was happening rather than a mental picture of what was happening.

INT: So what kind of things did he tell you were going on?

NAR: Nothing unusual other than that they were working on it and they had a command post and there was a lot of confusion at the beginning of course with reporters and all sorts of things and in the town itself, you know the lodging and that, but they all carried the little counters and he never at any time found it on the island, outside of course, the reactors to be above level that they were told was dangerous so that we did not really panic as such because of this.

INT: Had he ever been on the island before?

NAR: Many times.

INT: He found it really pretty much the same?

NAR: Except the chaos that was happening with all the people; the amount of people was so tremendous that this in itself was creating traffic problems which was his particular concern. And of course there were dignitaries in and out constantly so this created a lot of notoriety, etc. that was not the average.

INT: Did you have any ideas that anything that happened there at TMI has affected your health?

NAR: No.

INT: You don't think it has either now or later?

NAR: No.

INT: And that's basically because your husband was walking around with a counter.

NAR: Right. Now I would not say this perhaps with our son because he is young and I would not know what to say about this if there were that we are not aware of. That would probably not be in small enough doses that this would not show up in my estimation until maybe 15-20 years from now or even longer. This would be a question in my mind. I don't think anyone really has an answer to this. If scientists don't, certainly I won't.

INT: Do you think any aspects of your life have been affected at all?

NAR: No, not really.

INT: How about the community in general?

NAR: I think they're more aware. I think that most people who read or are inquisitive knew or paid attention to this before, but I think a lot of people really didn't and I think they now are very aware of the possibility of danger and so forth or at least somewhat aware.

INT: What do you think the consequences of the awareness will be?

NAR: Maybe they will take more of an interest into what happened and the controls and this nature that most of us were not that interested or involved in before. I think everyone takes more of an active interest now. Not only here, but all over the country which is good.

INT: Possibly all over the world?



NAR: I have a feeling. Yes, I think so; they know where we sit now. They didn't know that we existed before.

INT: Everybody knows where Harrisburg is now.

NAR: Yeah, I think so.

INT: Did you find yourself concerned with milk or food from the area?

NAR: It crossed my mind but I didn't really change any of my habits.

INT: You didn't stop drinking milk?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you picture in your mind any affects that the radiation might have on the environment?

NAR: I really don't know how to answer that. I had a question in my own mind with the animals and things that went with it after the reports of the difference with the cows dying and their calves being stillborn.

INT: When was this? I didn't hear about that.

NAR: It was not too many months back.

INT: Really?

NAR: Yes. The papers carried all these...

INT: This was before or after?

NAR: No, no after this was just in the past few months. And there was a question pass my mind at that point but I also realized that if there had been any involvement or if it had any bearing on it, it was obviously too late to really be concerned with it now. We should have been concerned with it at the very moment with the production of milk and things at that point.

INT: So what happened with these cattle? They were just dying?

NAR: Well, I'm only repeating what I read in the various newspapers, but there were quite a few deaths of cows and stillborn calves in the Lancaster County area shortly after this within a three month period after this.

INT: Would this be in an area very close to Three Mile Island?

NAR: Well, Lancaster County is just below TMI.

INT: So it's like south?

NAR: Southeast. And this of course crossed my mind but then there was also a parallel which I am sure this makes news so there's also a parallel of how many would have maybe died of natural causes within the same span of time that we would have never been made aware of so you have to take this into consideration too. And I'm certainly not aware of the statistics either way.

INT: Did you think of your own death at all during the incident?

NAR: Not really.

INT: Did you think of that of others?

NAR: No, I'm a fatalist, I feel if it had happened the day that it escaped and gone completely, we would have never known the difference. I'm not you know basically frightened of death so I didn't consider this too much. I was more concerned with my family that were on the island than with myself because they were sitting underneath the umbrella and I was way up here, so I really didn't think too much about that.

INT: You thought you'd all survive then?

NAR: I was hopeful, yes. Optimistic is the word.

INT: Did you think of God during the incident?

NAR: I think of God all the time, off and on. That is very much a part of my life.

INT: How do you think he figured into this whole thing?

NAR: I really didn't get into that. No, I don't...

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: Well, I do that all the time. So that was not a new part of my life.

INT: Did you pray for anything in particular?

NAR: I think that is sort of a personal question. My religious beliefs on that are very personal to me and I don't confuse it with TMI ok? That wouldn't change my picture one way or the other. There are many other things happening all the time in life if you are going to perceive danger and death, this may happen and that and the other thing and I really think you can get it out of context to your spiritual life. It didn't change my pattern of religion.

INT: Did you feel that you needed to resort to your religion as a calming effect upon yourself or anything like that?

NAR: I resort on my religion for anything that upsets my life, so that's what I mean. It really didn't change my pattern of feelings. I'm not a religious fanatic but anything that upsets my life, I resort to this as a strength factor so it really didn't change my pattern in any way, shape, or form.

INT: When you felt you needed strength you just...?

NAR: Did what I do everyday.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities toward your job or your family during the incident?

NAR: Certainly, I don't think you just run away because things go bad.

INT: Did you find conflicts between the two?

NAR: No. My whole family is sort of geared to you do what's expected of you, when you don't, don't run away from it. I don't think that serves too much purpose unless you are told that this is eminent danger and of course then it's a personal decision.

INT: You said that your job wasn't really affected at all by the incident.

NAR: No, not really. Not in the daily operation of it. There were contingent plans that I overheard that in case things went beyond this or they did evacuate which were necessary in case it did happen but I did not become actively involved in any of that.

INT: You didn't have anything to do that you normally wouldn't do?

NAR: With the decisions or thoughts on it or anything, no.

INT: Do you have any ideas of how it would best be to behave in a situation like this? Like a certain code of behavior?

NAR: In a calm manner. Mainly. Find out what's happening before you panic.

INT: Did you feel that you acted in this way?

NAR: Pretty much so, yes.

INT: Do you think there was anything that made it difficult to react that way?

NAR: No.

INT: Anything that was trying to commit you to behave otherwise?

NAR: No.

INT: Did the event bring to mind any past experiences? Did you start thinking of things that had happened to you before?

NAR: Not really because it was an unrelated event to anything that's happened before.

INT: Do you think anything like this has happened before in history?

NAR: Not in our country, I don't think. I think this is the first accident of this caliber in our country before.

INT: So it's unique.

NAR: Somewhat, uh huh. I think the possibilities, the problems of the same kind might be more in the forefront of our mind than it would have been in the past, before this happened.

INT: Did you find that something like this was more frightening than something like a flood or a hurricane or even war?

NAR: Of a longer lasting nature, yes. But not a particularly personal nature, because they all could be dangerous to you, you know. But I think it would have longer lasting effects. Generation after generation type effects than perhaps a flood or this type of thing might have on you in particular.

INT: So it was frightening in the long term rather than the short term?

NAR: Yes, I think so because of the nature of it.

INT: What parts of it frightened you the most?

NAR: Just that, the long nature possibility of danger to people and to things and your environment, yes, yes I think so. An imminent danger you get in your car and rive away from it. But this is something that is a little bit more intangible in its long run effects on human beings and animals and vegetation, ect.

INT: Did you find that anything like a movie or a television shows or books or stories you'd read came to mind?

NAR: No. In fact the China Syndrome was playing here at the time, and I did not go for the very reason that I thought that it may influence my thinking and I didn't want to do that.

INT: Have you seen it since?

NAR: No, I haven't. I would like to, but it just hasn't been available to me when I've been able to go. It hasn't been in the area when I've been available to see it. But if I ever have the opportunity, I will.

INT: You will?

NAR: Yes. Because of the similarity, you know.

INT: But you didn't think of any stories or anything like that?

NAR: No. Mostly it brought to mind that the Civil Defense Training program they had years ago was simply because it was a rather similar type thing that I learned, you know.

INT: What kinds of things did they teach you?

NAR: The types of bombs and the large nature of it and the how far reaching nature it would be. The damage that could be brought by it, and how long of a lasting nature, they type of illness that would be, that would happen after a certain period of time, and how it would inflict itself on you and so on.

INT: Did you associate this incident with a bomb?

NAR: No, I didn't. But I associated the illnesses and things that could come of it if more gas had escaped. Because it would have been the same type of thing.

INT: Would have been the same weapon, you could say that.

NAR: Well, no I didn't mean like an explosion, no. But the illnesses that would have been wrought by it would have been the same.

INT: So you didn't think of the bubble bit being a potential for an explosion?

NAR: Oh, no. I thought more of people dying from the exposure to it and/or illnesses created by it in the future.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any daydreams?

NAR: No, not really.

INT: Did it disturb your sleep at all?

NAR: Not really.

INT: Did you notice any changes happening to people around you during the incident?

NAR: Not in particular; maybe in general. I think they were more aware of their environment and things that went with TMI and the reactors and that, you know. But this was hard not to be influenced, not watching TV, reading the newspaper, or listening to the radio, you know.

INT: Do you think it changed you at all?

NAR: Not really...because I was aware of a lot of other things; you know, from going to school years ago that were maybe the average public was not aware of prior to this. So it really didn't really change my concern.

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

NAR: Oh, quite a few.

INT: Do you remember any of them?

NAR: No, I don't.

INT: Not at all?

NAR: No, not really.

INT: Did you find them funny when you heard them?

NAR: Not really because I don't think it basically is a very funny thing. But I think you need leverage on a tense situation also, so it served its purpose maybe.

INT: What do you think its purpose was?

NAR: Because it relieves the tension. I think this is necessary if anything drastic happens or in a tension wrought situation. I think people need it. For instance, during war, joking is a huge thing with servicemen and that's an absolute necessity, because it allows them to maintain their equilibrium, you know, with the tension they're living with. So it served its purpose perhaps. I don't think radioactive gases escaping are in anyway funny, but I think the tense situation often needs the joking to be able to maintain a balance, you know, in your life.

INT: Have you even experience this situation with servicemen or something like that?

NAR: No. I just know that during the war times, don't forget, I lived through a few war times, there is a lot more joking about servicemen and the things that go with it then there are normally.

INT: So people that aren't involved in the actual fighting are the ones doing the joking?

NAR: No, people involved them and others. It's a tense time and a very desperate time people have to do this in order to maintain their equilibrium, their balance.

INT: The people around you, who were either listening to the jokes or telling the jokes did they think they were funny?

NAR: No, I think they were just clowning to break the monotony of worry, you know really.

INT: Have you changed your mind at all about nuclear energy or is your opinion pretty much the same?

NAR: Not a whole lot, no. Only in that I think people will now take an active part in controls and I think this is necessary. And I think especially the companies that were using it, were not nearly as stringent on the rules. Well, this was obvious. They said it had been scheduled for a check up, but had not had it, and so forth. So, quite obviously, they were not as stringent as they should have been. They got kind of a complacent attitude when things go ok. But I think when things go wrong like this, it sort of makes everybody wake up and say, "hey look here: we better do this, and do it stringently." And I think they will. At least, people in this state will and I think in the country, really. This was obvious in Mr. Denton changing his mind about giving accreditation to the more reactors being opened. The people and the committee did change its mind; and I think this was good I feel. I think they should be given permission, but I think they should do it only with very tight controls. So maybe it's nothing more than a scare that did do that.

INT: But you still think it's something necessary?

NAR: I think we don't have much choice, with our energy needs.

INT: That's perhaps all I really have. Can you think of anything else?

NAR: No, not really.

INT: Anything that I may have forgotten?

NAR: No.

INT: Nothing else to say?

NAR: No I don't believe so.