

Date: June 26, 1979

Occupation: Personnel Director for Cumberland County

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember when you first heard that there was a problem at three mile island?

NARRATOR: Yes. And I believe it was sort of complicated. The main events, when did the first leak occur, on Wednesday? My assistant and I shared an office at the time, and she was on the phone talking with, I believe it was her mother, and her mother asked her if we had heard anything, and we said no we hadn't. Her mother said there was an announcement on the radio. We called the Commissioner's they called civil defense and found out that at that time our, even our civil defense people had not been notified. So, we, I basically heard it from, then we turned the radio on after that, so I heard it via phone conversation.

INT: So right away then you sought more information?

NAR: Yes. We turned the radio on and got WHP which, to provide us with more information and I also at the same time talked to Commissioner, yeah, talked to Commissioner Myers about calling Neil at the college, Professor Wolf to find out what he thought, and to kind of keep us posted.

INT: How did you feel about it at that point? Were you worried or concerned about it, or...?

NAR: No, I was concerned, very concerned about it. My general reaction at a time like that in order to keep calm is to seek more information and feel that as long as I do have information that I feel more in control of the situation, so, and I also felt as personnel director that we became immediately concerned with problems with our nursing home and other kinds of things. And concerned with getting people back and forth, staffing, who would leave town, and general things like that. How we could set up emergency personnel pools if we needed to.

INT: Then this was the general direction, your work took then over the next uh...?

NAR: Yeah it started to and then I started getting directly involved in the operation itself because I was local. And throughout Thursday, we just generally sought more and more information, I was not directly involved with the operation downstairs. Friday, that, the same level of operation...just getting more and more information and a little bit of work with the county home administrator and the work which they were doing with health coordinators to get things set up and then I worked here Friday night and then through the weekend. By that time I was more directly involved with the emergency operation itself and...

INT: We were talking about, actually the direct question would be were your routines different?

NAR: Oh, definitely, definitely. The priorities in the office at that point, we had full staff through Friday, and my assistant left town and then over the weekend I called, I did call back in one of my high school interns to work and she became part of the stenography pool that sort of head quartered out of the Commissioner's office. And I did whatever John Burgess wanted me to do or whatever else seemed to be necessary. Worked with Mrs. Whittiker and some of the...worked on public relations and just generally made myself available.

INT: You said initially that you were concerned because it was general concern, did your...did that change over time, did your concern ... in any way?

NAR: My concern did, but my concern did more not, not in a personal sense. I was not, probably not having children and not being that close, I was not concerned for my own personal safety. I was concerned for...in terms of the melt down, in terms of the river, in terms of the Chesapeake, in terms of just general, the disaster that was there. And also very concerned that in a Philosophical sense that we could have something like nuclear power plants without the safeguards. I was also extremely upset to find that the nuclear regulatory commission only required disaster plans for a five mile radius instead of, and when I got to working much more closely with the emergency preparedness people, I feel that if most of the residents at the time would really realize that there was no plan. That was going on here was developing a plan, and that there had been nothing before, there would probably be a lot more panic than they were. That concerned me greatly, that there was just shoddiness in terms of what should have been done.

INT: You knew there should have been the prior planning.

NAR: Oh, absolutely, and at that, and then you begin to wonder about all the other kinds of possibilities for other kinds of accidents. And that was of concern. I was concerned about people around me who have children and people who were pregnant and what was going to happen to them and of course, whether they could get the thing shut down.

INT: Do you think they were in control of the situation over there?

NAR: No, I have, not, not initially at all.

INT: What made you uneasy about it?

NAR: Contradictions in information that was given out. The fact that our civil defense people had not even been notified, that this had taken place prior to hearing it over the radio. That they had no control over information themselves, and if they had no control over the information it's doubtful that they had control over exactly what was going on.

INT: I'm going to refine that question a little bit. How do you feel about the way Metropolitan Edison handled this?

NAR: Very poorly. I think that they were looking out for the best interests of Metropolitan Edison and not looking out for the best interest of the public. And at the first initial problem, they should have contacted the people that...or the emergency people who were involved, and I feel they were more interested in covering up than to alert the public to the fact that there could be an imminent disaster.

INT: What about state government?

NAR: I was a little bit confused, and surprised. I did not feel that whomever it should have been, whether it was the energy council or whatever agency of the state government, they did not appear to play a particularly active role. I didn't find any information from them. Uhm, basically it was coming from the NRC and I don't, I don't know that they had a negative role but I don't feel that they provided anything of substance. We were told as a matter of fact that we were on our own...as a county. And working with civil defense and emergency preparedness and that we were on our own.

INT: What about NRC, how do you feel about their role?

NAR: I feel that their role ultimately when they sent representative in was a very good one and I think a very honest one. I think that one of the problems was that there probably was not close enough regulation by the NRC over the local licensing, the licensee and in that sense, I think that they probably were not terribly responsible, responsibly whatever I want to say. They should have tighter controls and I'm sure now they will have tighter controls but I, they were late in coming in, and I think there was some confusion there in their own administration and probably some political, some politics involved.

INT: Um, uh, what about national...apart from us...?

NAR: You know, I don't have any real strong sense at the time of their playing, until Carter came in, of their playing much of a part either. And I think probably that's because my contacts over that long week were with the regional civil defense people and the state representative and it was on a very different level. And that's aside from always listening to Denton's news conferences whenever they were on, that was my basic contact, so I did not see national television much during that time. I listened to WHP, Harold Denton and then the general local operation, and that was my basic source of information so I don't have a strong sense of state government or federal government's role.

INT: You mentioned not being in touch with national television but you were listening to the radio, what's your judgment of that role the media played in all of this to the degree that you were in touch with it?

NAR: I felt that WHP did an admirable job. I found that the information that they carried and as a matter of fact Hal Jerome was doing it, was doing the summations was very responsible. Very informative.

INT: Was there anybody in all of these sources of information that you found more trustworthy than others?

NAR: Well, Denton, of course the NRC, uhm, and then we all, Neil was here, Professor Wolf, I always, he always came up and listened so his commentary on what was being said was very, very informative and I just found HP and Hal Jerome and Denton the ones that I listened to the most. I found other people did too.

INT: Was there anybody you particularly mistrusted?

NAR: In the media?

INT: Mmm...well...just available sources of information.

NAR: Metropolitan Edison, but other than that, no.

INT: Um, you said you felt that they weren't particularly in control at that point, do you think they are now?

NAR: Metropolitan Edison, or the NRC?

INT: Well, the people that are overseeing the plant?

NAR: At three mile island in particular or just in general? No, that's probably because I just, as a result of all of it, distrust the control that anybody has over nuclear power at the moment. I think that there are too many unanswered questions that the NRC, that the scientists, that the chemists, that other people just simply do not have, and that until we do have that kind of information that we shouldn't be operating.

INT: Uhm, you've talked about your change in your work. Did any other of your routines change?

NAR: Yeah, at home because basically, I wouldn't, my husband fending for himself because I was back and forth and wasn't sure what my hours were. And I became, except for going home to sleep, I spent most of my time here.

INT: Did you make any plans that you wouldn't have ordinarily?

NAR: No, I didn't make any plans except to be at work.

INT: Did you ever think about leaving?

NAR: No, unh-nhn. Oh, we kidded around because my brother's in Indianapolis, and that if we were gonna go anywhere we would head west. No, we were being, as a host area, it was very important that people remained here.

INT: So you were felling some sense of responsibilities to the community?

NAR: Oh, absolutely. Yeah.

INT: Can you talk about this?

NAR: Uhm, it was the community as well as probably, I think, probably the county as an entity and the responsibility to be around to help out at the county home where I knew if we had to be a host area that we were going to have personnel problems because we also started losing a lot of our personnel, and how...just trying, in general, be available to help out because I did not fear for myself or my husband or anyone else.

INT: So you at no time feared for your own personal safety or safety of your family?

NAR: No. And there was no reason for me to evacuate, if I had children, I probably would have because I would've feared for them.

INT: You say that you were having personnel problems at the time, do you want to talk about that?

NAR: Well, potential ones. Just that if there were a number of staff people who decided to leave, that we would have to call in volunteers and other people to help staff to take care of the residents and in addition to just our own residents there would have been, the contingency plans were that we would take in people from other county homes that were close to Three Mile Island and then of course it would be the matter of making sure we had adequate personnel to take care of them.

INT: Did any personnel leave, were there evacuees in the personnel?

NAR: People, as in my office, and in the court house a number of individuals who went to visit, left the area because of fear. And we had a number of these at county home. It did not get to be critical and of course we didn't have to house anybody so...

INT: But there were people who did evacuate who were working at these places and so forth?

NAR: Unh-huh.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was happening over there, play it to a much more subjective area?

NAR: Well, as usual, I always, I can't operate in a vacuum so one of the things I did was to get out the issue of National Geographic which happened to come at the same time and get the anatomy of the nuclear power plant and ask Neil too, to explain to me so that I was, I did want a mental picture, I did have a good picture of where the bubble was, and exactly where the liquid was going and what the problems were.

INT: Did you ever imagine the worst happening over there?

NAR: Fortunately, we, Friday night we had planned to go see China Syndrome, which we didn't so I probably, having seen it later, I probably would have had a better idea at the time. Uhm, I think it was one of the Philadelphia papers, it was the Inquirer that I read during that time, and indicated, showed the map of New York and that if a melt down did occur the uninhabitable area that would have been created. So, yeah I did get an idea and think through to what would happen, ultimately.

INT: Did you have some ideas on how radiation would have affect your life?

NAR: Oh, yes.

INT: Can you talk about those?

NAR: Uhm, I remember going back to the cold war period and "ban the bomb" movements and I had images of ...

INT: You connected with that?

NAR: Oh, yeah and On the Beach and connected with the total desolation and the kind of quiet dead that occurs before a storm, and these kinds of subjective feelings that I had on what would happen after nuclear holocaust, or after a bomb would go off. That's the kind of general feelings I had about it. But then also the more silent kind, which is the hidden problems that are going on now. You know, over there. You know, the feeling that the milk that we drank during the time was probably alright because the cows were eating stored grain. But that, at what point is the grain that was growing over there at the time, ingested by the cows and are we going to get radiation in milk. And whether or not someone's gonna really be honest enough to tell us when that, when that happens. I think they would be.

INT: So you had a concern about food and milk from the area and so forth?

NAR: Uh-huh.

INT: Are you still watching that?

NAR: No, as a matter of fact, I guess what happens is that you go back into forgetting that it occurred and again since about the only product would be milk and the local...I

don't know, I guess I don't concern myself with whether I'm buying milk that comes from Pennsylvania or New York or some place else, and probably should be.

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

NAR: It might, it still could, you know in terms of cancer. Uhm, we don't know enough I understand that the samples that the health people have are so small that we don't know at this point low levels of radiation and build up over a period of time. I know myself I've had a lot of x-rays and I'm sure that I had more than the average so it would be very difficult to tell whether it came from radiation or whether it came from x-rays or a combination of both. But that's, I don't think there is any immediate danger but I'm sure that there will be many, many more cases of cancer and problems in the area in the future.

INT: Do you think it affected our communities in any other ways?

NAR: Well, I think that it depends on how quickly people want to, how quickly people are gonna want forget what happened. There will be numbers of people probably who will not move here, who might have otherwise, at least for the immediate future. Tourism, of course, that's going to be very difficult to tell because of the gasoline problem. And we have the gasoline problem couple with TMI at the time when people supposedly were traveling so that's going to be difficult to tell. Uhm, here, I don't think the community was affected, I think one of the, number of good things that came out of it and that was the closer working relationship with levels of government. The private sector and the public sector, and I think that was probably something very positive, I think its beginning to show itself now and we've got set up for dealing with the potential of an emergency problem due to gasoline. We probably will be better able to cope with the current emergency because of the plans and the things that were done during Three Mile Island.

INT: I'm going to go back to that subjective side again. Did you at any point think of your own death?

NAR: No.

INT: So you were fairly reassured that you would survive?

NAR: Mmh,-huh.

INT: What reassured you?

NAR: A fundamental belief that when we can send a man to the moon and when we can do the other kinds of things that someone would bring it under control. And just a basic faith in our ability to handle the situation.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have, actually I'm coming at a question you've already addressed, in one way in more than from another angle, did you have a, did you feel an ethical responsibility, did you feel that you had a responsibility to behave in certain ways?

NAR: Oh, absolutely, it was ethical as much as a sense of duty, I guess in that sense, to remain calm, to not overreact, to not spread rumors, to try to reassure other people who were getting panicked that they should listen to only good sources and not spread the rumors themselves, and I absorbed myself in work basically.

INT: During the course of the event, did any past experience of yours come to mind? Any historical event?

NAR: Well, I mentioned before, yeah that's..., yeah I think the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I remember one of those days, I don't remember which one maybe it was Saturday. It was one of those very grey days, it was very calm and no air moving, and you know the sky was grey, that all brought.

INT: Did you have a sort of daydream there?

NAR: Yeah, I was thinking about On the Beach and thinking about... oh I can't remember the name of one of the books that I read when I was younger, uh, when the desolation.

INT: Was it science fiction sort of?

NAR: Yeah, back then.

INT: One of the questions that has been asked directly is if books or films or such things occurred to you, you already said On the Beach...?

NAR: That's particular, I can't remember the name, it was a Seller's film, a funny film.

INT: A Seller's film.

NAR: Yeah, I think it was.

INT: The Stranger?

NAR: No, an older than that, I hope it comes to me.

INT: Did you find this sort of emergency any more or less frightening than say, a flood or a hurricane or war?



NAR: Less frightening?

INT: More or less.

NAR: More or less, kind of both. A hurricane is something we understand the causes of and we realize that you can prepare for it and can tell its coming ahead of time and you know what the ramifications are and the same thing with a flood. Something like this, since it had never happened before, it's less frightening because you don't know exactly what the consequences are and that also makes it more frightening so I think...

INT: It's kind of a dilemma?

NAR: Yeah, but I think its definitely more frightening, because we don't know how to handle it and each step of the way we don't know what the next set of occurrences might be and you know at what point are we really in danger and when does the danger subside.

INT: Uhm, did you have any sleeping dreams that you remember?

NAR: No.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed in any way?

NAR: No. I was too tired.

(mumbled conversation)

INT: Can you remember whether or not people around you changed in any way?

NAR: Well, I saw some behavior in people, let me think back, in a work situation. In a work situation there were a number of roles that changed. Uhm, John Broujos who generally is our solicitor, of course, his behavior changed as he became kind of the edge up commander and was in control. One of the young women who works for me, who I considered to be generally normal and under control and rational, I thought kind of fell apart. I mentioned her to you and she left. Uhm, I think basically the people I worked with during that time were people, who are generally work with, behaved very much the way they usually do.

INT: What, do you think, those that changed did it change them in any lasting way?

NAR: Donna's really about the only one I can think of. Uhm, I don't think so.

INT: What about you, did it change you in any lasting way?

NAR: I think the awareness of course is something that is lasting. I think that I am, I hope much more likely to monitor more closely what's going on but then I've always

been, I was against part of the Stony Creek Valley Coalition against PP& L's pump storage plan and been environmentally concerned anyway, so ...

INT: So you were aware of the reactors over there before this started?

NAR: Oh, yes long before, and in general we have worked against the governor's energy council's idea of putting in a nuclear park in the northern tier of Pennsylvania which came up a number of years ago. And the governor's energy council and I were very vocal in working and opposing that. Uhm, so lasting in terms that it's given me another area to be concerned about.

INT: Do you have an opinion about nuclear power now?

NAR: Oh, I did before, well it's worse now. I don't think, I think I mentioned earlier I don't think that we have enough understanding on how to dispose of the waste which is my basic concern. We may have the technology to use it but that we've got mausoleums floating all over the country now. We have, can't remember the figure on the number of tons of nuclear waste that we have no where to put. The research so far that I see that even in Canada they're doing which they can turn some of the liquid into solid and then encase it in concrete so it doesn't seep out. Uhm, but that we have no business producing it when we can't put the waste anywhere.

INT: So you think we should stop using nuclear power?

NAR: Yeah, the problem with that from a very realistic point of view is of course what do we use instead and then we have to get into ideas of conversation and incentives toward having people use less and different forms of energy.

INT: Did you hear any jokes about radiation at Three Mile Island?

NAR: Oh, yes one's from the tee shirt contest at Dickinson, you know and things like that but other than that no.

INT: Was there any joking around you here?

NAR: No. Just one wonderful story that one of the state representatives who was here told us and this was further on in the event that he was sitting in the Sunnyside and there was a guy there with his head on a shoulder and he'd had a few too many to drink and the bartender came over and asked, this was sick and it wasn't even a joke, came over and asked him if he could help in any way. And he said oh, no, there's nothing that can help me, he said, I sold the hardware for the computer or whatever it was for Three Mile Island and that everybody kind of, the guy that told it was really runny, that was about the only, you think you've got it bad look at what I have to live with. So,

INT: This was told here?

NAR: Yeah. He told us, he heard it at the Sunnyside.

INT: Did people laugh?

NAR: Yeah, this was much later on though, this was the next week, because we went on for, of course, a week before the meltdown. No, during that first weekend, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, no, no laughing at all.

INT: Is there anything else?

NAR: I don't think so. I had one observation that I was talking to some people about and that was a number, and you have it one of your questions, a number of people, who I considered to be religious and church goers, instead of at the time, I'm not a member of any organized Christian faith, but I do have lots of basic beliefs, but they did not feel that God or anything else was going to get them through it and that many of those people were people who left. That there was not, at least I'm sure a lot of interest will be, and you'll find out whether God and faith are going to be part of thing that will help you overcome this problem don't worry about, but there are a number of people who in the situation left. But I can't think of anything else.

INT: How did you feel about people that left?

NAR: If they didn't have children and from this area, I felt that they should have stayed because I felt we had a far greater responsibility to be here to help those people who did have to be evacuated and because we were a host area and there were many, many things to do, and people who needed to open up their homes. I felt that the people who, you know, if they did not have little children, were not in immediate danger, should have stayed.

INT: Should have stayed and helped the community take care of this incident. What about those with children? And there leaving, do you see it as appropriate?

NAR: Oh, yeah, I saw that as, I did see that as appropriate if they did have young children.

INT: Why?

NAR: Because of the problems with the effect of radiation.

INT: Which kind? What affect?

NAR: The bulletins that indicated that, I know within a five mile radius that they could have an affect on children in terms of cancer and other kinds of diseases and they were more likely to affect children than adults.

INT: Is there anything else?

NAR: I don't think so.