

August 17, 1979

Occupation: College Police Officer

INTERVIEWER: When did you first hear about TMI?

NARRATOR: I guess on the afternoon that it happened. I'm not even sure what the date is anymore. My wife called me from work. She works down in that area. She called me from down there to tell me something about it. That's the first I heard of it.

INT: Where does she work?

NAR: She works in Capitol Area Intermediate Unit in Lemoyne.

INT: At the school? Is that a school?

NAR: It's a school for mentally handicapped and physically handicapped. There's units all around. I don't know if you're familiar with the Walnut Bottom one or not. Well, their headquarters is in Lemoyne and she works in the headquarters.

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

NAR: Did I know that TMI existed?

INT: Yes. That the place was there.

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you know how far away it was?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did it bother you?

NAR: Not in the least.

INT: When you first heard about it, what did you think about it or talk about?

NAR: What did I first think about it? I don't know. At first I didn't know the whole story. Well, for weeks, I didn't know the whole story, but at the very first I didn't know the whole story. And it just seemed to me, I remember some of my first reactions were "How could something like this happen? How could such a major thing happen?" It doesn't seem to me like something that.... It seemed like such a major catastrophe at first, when I first heard about it, and I didn't see how that could happen.

INT: Did you talk to people about it?

NAR: I don't think you could help not to talk to people about it. Everybody was telling me that they were going to evacuate thirty miles around, and people were leaving their homes. So, yeah, I talked to people about it. I never initiated any conversations that I'm aware of, towards it. There were so many things going around, you didn't know really what to talk about.

INT: Did you start to seek out further information about it?

NAR: Only on the television.

INT: Only on the television?

NAR: Only on the television.

INT: You didn't read any newspapers or anything like that?

NAR: Well, I read them, but I figured if I could sit down and read it or sit in front of the television and hear about, I would rather hear about it on the news.

INT: Why?

NAR: The news has always impressed me. When Walter Cronkite's on, boy, he gives you the story. Walt don't lie!

INT: He doesn't lie. So did you trust him more than anybody else?

NAR: No, I don't mean to say that I'm so naïve that I think that everything on the news is the truth, but I don't know I get less distracted probably watching the TV. Reading the paper I can get distracted if the story doesn't keep my interest the whole way down.

INT: In talking about it with family and friends and co-workers and that kind of thing, what kinds of things did you talk about?

NAR: Well, a lot of my relatives live down in that area or east of that and pretty much of the concern was over whether they were going to evacuate, whether we're going to evacuate. And I think the other main thing was who's believing what at the time you know. Like I asked my wife how does she believe, what does she know so far to be true and then I would tell her what I know to be true. Then we called my mother who lives out in Chicago now and she was obviously worried. So we told her that we were not radioactive that we knew of as of yet.

INT: You weren't glowing?

NAR: No.

INT: Did your attitude change? At first you sort of didn't feel it was all that serious, but did you later?

NAR: Well I wouldn't say at first I didn't think it was serious. At first I couldn't believe it, well, I shouldn't say I couldn't believe, it just surprised me that something that major could happen. I think as time went on did my attitude change toward that? Not really. The stories, to this day, there's still so many different stories that come in about what happened. They're still going over it in the papers and in the news. I don't think my attitude really changed. It just maybe became a littler clearer. Some of the things were a little clearer.

INT: Did you start thinking it was serious?

NAR: Oh, I knew it was serious.

INT: But did you think it was serious as in crisis situation or anything like that?

NAR: I think anything like that has a touch of excitement that you... I don't know, it sort of takes away some of the potential tragedy involved. It's exciting, something like that. You think people will have to be evacuated. It's great. Not really.

INT: When you were listening to the television, were you paying more attention to it than you normally would?

NAR: Oh, yeah.

INT: Definitely following it then?

NAR: Sure.

INT: How did you feel about the media's handling of the situation?

NAR: I think there's two prongs to the media's duty in that situation was to get the news out fast, as fast as they could, and to get the news out accurately. I think some of the times the paths crossed and news was gotten out rapidly, but not very accurately. And then when they took more time and tried to explain it, the stories seemed to be different. There was a lot of different stories coming out. So I think that was their main problem - trying to get the news out too fast and trying to be accurate at the same time. In a situation like that, I think, I don't know, as urgent as it is to get the news out in a hurry, I think you have to be more accurate. If one of the two prongs of that has to suffer, it has to be the speed it which it gets out.

INT: So accuracy over speed?

NAR: Yes, but not the extent that there's no speed at all, because obviously people want to know right away what's going on. But telling them the wrong thing can be just as bad as waiting to tell them the right thing I think. Understand that?

INT: Yes, makes perfect sense. How about the government officials? How do you think they handled it?

NAR: Well, it's hard to say. It's hard to say how cause the only thing we know that government officials did was what the media told us they did. I was never down there, I never talked to any of the government officials. From what the media conveyed to me, I think the government officials did a good job in handling it, especially the federal government. I don't know on the state level, I really wasn't that involved with some of the things that were going on with the state was the same. But I think the federal government did a pretty good job of it.

INT: How about Met Ed?

NAR: Well, I think Med Ed was fighting for its life. I didn't really put too much stock in whatever they were saying because a lot of times... You have to realize their position. This is their head that's being chopped off here. And I think, I guess they... Obviously they didn't know really how to handle the situation either. I mean to come across in a logical way that can sort of save them and still get the facts out. So I don't really know how much to say about them. I made no sense in the last three minutes, I'm sorry. I don't know what else to say about Met Ed.

INT: You just don't really have any real strong opinions about that? You don't really know how to put it?

NAR: Yeah, not about the Met Ed aspect of it because they were in such a tight spot.

INT: So they were kind of hampered just by the situation?

NAR: Exactly, perfect.

INT: Was there anybody that you found particularly reliable, that you trusted most of all?

NAR: I don't know. Walt let me down a couple times there. And you know, I can't even think of the man's name from the... that the federal government sent in as...

INT: Denton?

NAR: Yeah. I don't know. I think he handled it pretty well. I don't know if he came out as the nuclear savior or what, but I think he did a pretty good job. And whatever he said, as long as it was taken, as long as what he said was not twisted, I think I would have put most of my trust in what he said.

INT: How about anybody that you particularly mistrusted?

NAR: I think I particularly mistrusted small-time and these immediate local like the...  
Uhh

INT: No, go ahead.

NAR: I think I mistrusted the small-time viewpoints on what happened.

INT: Small-time meaning what?

NAR: Well, not so much small-time as local. Let's say local. I'm not referring specifically to the Carlisle area, but... I don't know, maybe it's a prejudice on my part. You sort of take things more seriously coming from, let's use Walter Cronkite again, than you do, I don't even know what some of the local broadcasters are. But on W100, you hear some of those guys. So I think I mistrusted the local, I don't know if I should say local small-time, but the local media I probably just mistrusted the most. I'll just say that. The local media.

INT: They didn't inspire as much awe or trust as the other ones did?

NAR: Not at all, right.

INT: Did you think that the people in charge were in control of the situation over at Three Mile Island? This is at the time.

NAR: It's hard to say because again, you only know what the media tells you. And sometimes they told you now everything's under control and you felt one way and then the next thing they turn around and they say, "Everything's under control – but there's still... All the radiation is still leaking out and now we have this threat and this threat." So, I guess I'd have to say no because the danger was building for days there. It seems to me that somebody should have the knowledge to handle the situation. It seemed to me that everything was... they knew what was going on, but they couldn't stop it and they didn't know how to prevent further things. So if you take it that way, did they handle it well? I don't really know what all they could have done, not being a nuclear expert myself, I don't know what they could have done as opposed to what they did so I really couldn't say.

INT: Looking back on it now, do you think they were in control or do you still feel that same way?

NAR: I still really feel the same way. I don't know what... I know the problems were there and I know they knew the problems were there. As to whether they could have done things this way or that way, I don't think I'm really in a position to say.

INT: How about now? Do you feel that they know what they're doing now?

NAR: I think it was a big learning experience. Despite the potential of a tragedy, I think it was a good learning for the nuclear efforts. I'm not sure what will come of it, but I think it's a good learning experience.

INT: Were you worried?

NAR: Yeah, but you bring the excitement in before and that sort of covers the worry.

INT: So it sort of seemed like a big game on top of everything?

NAR: I guess you could say that. I don't, yeah, I'll say that. I don't want you to think that I didn't take it seriously, because I think I took a good approach to the whole situation.

INT: Did you think that there was a certain way you should have behaved in that situation?

NAR: On duty, I think there was. It's funny, people expect people in uniform to know everything about what's going on. What the plans are for the next thing. That way I think there was an expected type behavior that you should follow. But as far as off duty, I probably should have taken a more serious look at it. Tried to find out more about the background of the incident, not just the facts, what happened, but get the details of more nuclear background. I don't have any nuclear background. So, I probably could have taken a more serious look into the fundamentals of nuclear energy. That probably would have... but I didn't have the interest... ambition I should say.

INT: The what?

NAR: I didn't have the ambition.

INT: Oh, the ambition.

NAR: I had the interest, but not the ambition.

INT: So basically you were just reacting the way that you felt that you should on duty and there was no real code of behavior for off duty that you felt that you should follow?

NAR: Not really.

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

NAR: You mean about leaving or anything?

INT: Leaving, yeah, leaving would be good.

NAR: Well, obviously in doing what we do, there's no way we go.

INT: Meaning you as campus police?

NAR: Right, but there was other things. We were, as a matter of fact the day after the incident started, we were supposed to go down to Harrisburg for something or other. I forget what it was, and we cancelled the plans for that. That's really the only change I made that I can think of.

INT: Did you change any ordinary routines? Like maybe you were on campus longer or doing different things when you were on duty?

NAR: We had a couple departmental procedures that we implemented for the... you know, having the cars ready. I'm sure the College was ready for any plans, major plans. A lot of the students of course were involved in the way to handle parents, calls and stuff like that. But as far as off duty, it didn't really... I probably listened to the news a little more than I usually do.

INT: Did you find a lot of people that you work with changing in any way? Or people that you just encountered on campus? Did you find them acting differently from what they normally...

NAR: Not really, not under the circumstances. I mean, obviously everybody was surrounded with the air of excitement and fear, in a lot of cases. I think a lot of... well, naturally a lot of students left because of it. That's probably the biggest change in normal activities was that a lot of them left. But I don't think there was any, aside from what you would expect, a lot of questions, a lot of speculation, a lot of discussion, there wasn't really anything out of the ordinary.

INT: Did you think about leaving?

NAR: No.

INT: Not at all?

NAR: No. I thought about sending my wife had... Oh, do I come across as the big hero here. I was going to leave my wife, send my wife and I would stay behind. But no, I really didn't. First of all, I didn't think the need would arise that I would have to go. And I knew that if it would, if it would, being a campus police officer I would be one of the last to go.

INT: Did you make plans for your wife to leave or where she would go if she had to leave?

NAR: Nothing more than some oral plans. We talked about it once or twice.

INT: Did you think of things that she would pack if she left?

NAR: I don't think it really ever got that far. We talked about, her parents live in Mechanicsburg, which is about maybe, ten miles from the reactor site, eight or ten miles. So when they were talking about a ten mile radius, we discussed some plans, not with them, but about them. But again there, nothing was set down really permanent. Cause I personally didn't think the thing would arise that the need would arise to leave.

INT: Was there anybody that you were watching to decide whether it was time to leave or whether the time was coming?

NAR: When the man on this nameplate (Lucky Talbot) right here tells me to go, I go. If not, I will stay.

INT: Your boss?

NAR: My boss.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was going on at the reactor, at TMI?

NAR: At the site itself?

INT: Yes.

NAR: I don't think so. I'm sort of glad I wasn't in the position where I had to make any of the decisions, not knowing anything about it. I don't really think I had any mental pictures.

INT: Do you think that anything that happened there has affected your health or will in the future?

NAR: Impossible to say. So far it hasn't. If I have something that's going to show up in thirty years, I'd have no way of knowing now.

INT: True. You're just hoping at this point. Do you think that any aspects of your life or the community life have been changed by all of it?

NAR: My life hasn't, at all, in the least. As far as the community, there's no real visible sign that I can see. There's no lead shields being put around the city. There's no massive... Well, another thing, as far as evacuation plans, I think was another good aspect of it, because from what I heard from the media, there were no real crisis evacuation plans in this area. So, I'm sure now there had been some established and should the need arise in the future, we might be a little more prepared. That will probably be the only thing that has changed that I could see in the community.

INT: If the worst thing had happened, what do you think it maybe have been? What is your image of the worst?

NAR: Well, from what I heard, I think everybody was talking about a meltdown. I think probably that was my... As in terms of effect of the countryside?

INT: And effects, yes.

NAR: Well, from what I understood the meltdown was to be the worst thing. And I heard plans, not plans, but predictions that if this type of meltdown would occur, so many miles, so big of an area would be contaminated for hundreds of years and people would be wiped out by the thousands, other people affected for the rest of their lives. So, really I don't know how played up that was, but that's what I think the worst thing would be – the dreaded meltdown. And the scariest thing was when they told you that there was a potential of that. Because in the beginning, they told you what happened and then they said "But the worst thing that could happen would be a meltdown, but that was sort of in the future." And then all of a sudden they're telling you there's bubbles in there and there was a potential meltdown in process. That was probably the worst time, I think.

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

NAR: Probably be dead.

INT: You think it could have, would have killed people then?

NAR: If what I understood to be the worst thing that could have possibly happened, I'm sure it would have.

INT: Did you have any concerns about food or milk from the area?

NAR: Not really, I had heard some, but I didn't take any... It didn't stop me from drinking Harrisburg Dairies Milk or anything.

INT: Did you have any pictures, any images of the effects of radiation on the environment, on the life around you?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you think of your own death?

NAR: Pardon me.

INT: Did you think of your own death?

NAR: Did I think of my own death at the time? Not for one second.

INT: How about of other people?

NAR: Not so much. I was concerned for other people's health. I don't think I ever thought, "what if this person dies or what if that person dies."

INT: So you thought that everyone would pretty much survive this whole thing?

NAR: I guess. Well, I guess. I had no idea. I knew there were potential health risks involved, plenty of them. But I might add here that I myself, am immortal and I will not die. I'll just say that. So I didn't have any fear for myself.

INT: Good reasoning. Did you think of God during the incident?

NAR: Yes. I don't know in what aspect I thought of him. I can't really say that I ever said. I don't know, I'm sure... I can't really say. I really don't know.

INT: Did you think that He was trying to teach mankind a lesson or anything like that?

NAR: No, I don't believe that. How could He, this was all man-made.

INT: It was all man-made. So He doesn't... you don't really feel that He had anything to do with man making it? Did you think that God had anything to do with man's making the reactor at TMI?

NAR: Well, I don't know. That's getting pretty... You can talk about things like that forever. I will just say no so we can go to the next question. He's sitting in the next office and I think He's the next interviewer, so you can talk with him.

INT: Alright, I'll talk with him. Did you pray?

NAR: (Long pause) Not really.

INT: Not about the incident or anything like that?

NAR: No. Not really.

INT: No more than usual?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities during the incident?

NAR: To what?

INT: Towards your family or your job or anything like that?

NAR: Well, I think we've already discussed the job responsibilities.

INT: I mean you can elaborate on that if you'd like.

NAR: No.

INT: Okay.

NAR: Well, its pretty obvious what we had to do around here. It was just be careful. One of the problems that evolved from this, a lot of people leaving, was the possibilities of looting, with all the vacant rooms. Some prime problems that way. But as far as personal responsibilities, I think even though at the time I didn't think of it as one, I think I sort of felt a responsibility to myself as well as my family to try my best to stay in touch with what was going on and try and understand it.

INT: You were saying about looting, did it ever actually happen, that things were looted?

NAR: Not really.

INT: So it didn't really cause you any extra work? Or did it?

NAR: Not in that aspect it didn't. Not really.

INT: Did you have more patrolling than usual?

NAR: Yeah. I think that was the good part, we were aware of the potential that this thing caused and there were extra patrols out and more surveillance. This type of thing.

INT: Was that both campus police and Carlisle police?

NAR: Yeah. Some of our students have eyes too.

INT: Okay, so they were your eyes when you weren't around. Did you find yourself thinking about any kinds of past events that may have happened to you? Anything that you've experienced?

NAR: No. I think what you're trying to ask me is did I ever think that this is my time to go.

INT: No, but did you?

NAR: No, not in the least. I told you I'm immortal.

INT: You're immortal, okay. No, what I'm asking or trying to ask in this sense is did you start thinking of anything that has ever happened before? Did the event remind you

of something that you've experienced before? Some other kind of catastrophe that may have happened to you when you were younger? Or even this year?

NAR: Not really. I guess, I was always afraid the TV might meltdown, but that's about it, that's the only thing.

INT: Really.

NAR: No. There's really nothing that that reminded me of or that it put me in mind of at all.

INT: Did you think that something like this has ever happened before in history?

NAR: Not really, because I don't see how it could have.

INT: Meaning without people having heard about it?

NAR: The "China Syndrome."

INT: Did you think of that? Had you seen that?

NAR: No, I didn't see it, but some of the parallels that were drawn with it I thought were pretty interesting. As far as it... Nobody knows what goes on in this world, don't kid yourself. Nobody does. Next question, please.

INT: Alright, did you think it was more or less frightening that something like a flood or a hurricane or even war?

NAR: I don't know. There's two types of fear involved there. This is so much of a mental fear because as far as we know, nothing was really damaged the way it can be in a hurricane. In a hurricane or flood or something, you can see the damages. Boy, the news will be covered with it. Floods everywhere, look at this and everybody sitting at the TV going "Wow!" But here they say, "This could happen, this could happen. There could be invisible radiation seeping out." It's a different type of fear. It's more mental than a physical type of fear. Because if there was a flood in Harrisburg, I would be relatively sure that there's no way the flood's coming up here. But if there's radiation leakage...

INT: Then you're not all that sure.

NAR: Then you don't know. It's again, for most people, well I'd say majority of the people, like the fear of the unknown, because everything is relatively... I'm sure to the average person on the street, nuclear background is almost non-existent as far as education.

INT: Okay, so it was basically the fear of the unknown. Did you start thinking of any television shows or movies or books or stories? Did anything like that come to mind, something you may have read or seen on television?

NAR: No. Just the parallels, like I said drawn to the “China Syndrome.”

INT: Have you seen it since?

NAR: No.

INT: So you have no idea what everybody was talking about when they said “The China Syndrome” or did you?

NAR: Well, I knew the basic plotline. That’s about all.

INT: What do you know about it?

NAR: About the plotline in the “China Syndrome?”

INT: Yes about the “China Syndrome.” What kinds of things were you thinking about?

NAR: All I heard was that there was a nuclear accident that was covered up, I guess so that the public wouldn’t find out and panic. That’s the basic plotline I knew. That there was the cover-up of a similar type of accident dealing with nuclear power. Whether it was the same thing, a meltdown, I don’t really know.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: Not anything unusual.

INT: Did you have any daydreams about the incident that you remember?

NAR: No. At the time, it occupies your mind a lot, because you’re interested in it, but as far as having any daydreams or visions of what might be happening down there, I didn’t let it take over my mind completely.

INT: How about sleeping dreams?

NAR: No problems.

INT: Did it disturb your sleep?

NAR: Not at all.

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

NAR: Oh, yeah.

INT: Do you remember any?

NAR: Just some of the t-shirts.

INT: Which ones?

NAR: “Visit Harrisburg and have 2.3 children” or something like that.

INT: Don’t you remember any others?

NAR: Well, I’ll tell you, there’s a guy I know that works down there.

INT: At Three Mile Island?

NAR: Yeah, and he has a shirt that says “Fantasy Island” and then the date, I forget what the date was.

INT: Fantasy Island?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Really. Why? Did he say what it meant?

NAR: No.

INT: What do you think it means?

NAR: I don’t know. It’s just, I don’t know. There’s so much money is made off this type of thing, its ridiculous... I know there was cans. My next door neighbor has a can from Harrisburg, PA and it’s labeled all up. It was put out as a radiation can. This can contains radiation from the TMI and there was warning labels on the side. Sarcastic remarks about it. They got carried away with it. I don’t understand it and it’s ridiculous.

INT: What is it? Just a sealed can?

NAR: Yes.

INT: With nothing in it?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Oh, wow. How much did he pay for that?

NAR: I don't know. He didn't even get it in this area. Some one of his friends or family from far away sent it to him.

INT: That's interesting. Did people think it was funny? That the jokes were funny?

NAR: Probably.

INT: Probably?

NAR: Most likely, I'm sure they did.

INT: Did you tell any jokes to anybody, those that you had heard?

NAR: Oh, yeah. We passed those things around.

INT: Did they laugh?

NAR: Sure.

INT: Why do you think they were joking so much?

NAR: Well, I don't know, that's a good question. I could sit here and say that anybody that would make light of a situation with the potential tragedy of the Three Mile Island is an immature, irresponsible person. On the other hand, I don't want to get too philosophical here, but there's so many things that go on in this world, if you take each one seriously and analyze it and try to realize the potential dangers to yourself and the others around, because of it, you'll go nuts.

INT: So they're basically doing it so that they don't go nuts instead of taking it seriously?

NAR: That and some of them are immature, irresponsible people.

INT: Have you developed any opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: I don't know. I've been pretty much borderline ever since. We were just out to Chicago a few weeks ago and in the airport these two girls were standing with these sandwich posters supporting nuclear power. And for some reason, I had the urge to go up and just ask them where they live. And then tell them I'm from... well I was going to cheat a little bit, I was going to tell them I was from Middletown. So I don't really know how I stand on the subject. I'll have to ask myself one of these days.

INT: Did you feel differently before the incident? Or did you have any strong opinions for or against?

NAR: Towards nuclear power?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Really, as much as I'm sort of ashamed to say it, I really didn't even look into the subject at all. I really didn't know anything about it.

INT: Is there anything else you'd like to say about all this? Something I may have forgotten?

NAR: Nothing at all. I'm completely finished.