

June 20, 1979

Occupation: Secretary

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

NARRATOR: I guess the first day that it happened. They called us from over at the state saying that they had some gases had escaped, but there was no problems to Cumberland County at this time. They called our office because I'm secretary to Tom Blosser who is director of Emergency Preparedness.

INT: And they called you directly and said that there was no problem about it?

NAR: No problems at this time for Cumberland County.

INT: And you heard from the state?

NAR: Right.

INT: Do you remember what you thought about at that point?

NAR: It really didn't faze me one way or the other, because they said there was no danger, so I just... I guess I really didn't realize the danger it could produce.

INT: In other words at that point you weren't...?

NAR: I wasn't upset, I wasn't scared or nervous no.

INT: Did you know there was a reactor there before this occurred?

NAR: I knew there was one there, but I never really paid any attention to it.

INT: Do you know how far Three Mile Island is from us?

NAR: No. I do now, but I didn't know at that time.

INT: But you didn't then, you found that out eventually.

NAR: Right.

INT: Did you seek out any further information at that point?

NAR: No, not at that point.

INT: Did you later? Did things change? Did your attitude toward things change?

NAR: Mr. Commissioner Mayer had heard about it and he got upset and he came down and wanted to know what was going on. And then I thought, "Well maybe there's more to this than what they were telling us." And at the time it happened, Mr. Blosser wasn't in the office. He was up in Selinsgrove. Him and his..., assistant director the day it happened.

INT: And the Commissioner's coming down made you think, "Maybe we ought to be more concerned about this?"

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you then seek more information about it?

NAR: Commissioner Mayer said he would call... He wanted to call the state and they wouldn't give him any information and he called several other people. Then he tried to get a hold of Mr. Blosser to find out what's going on.

INT: Can you think of when you began to feel that it might be a really serious situation?

NAR: I guess the next day when I come into work and Mr. Blosser's here. I think they, round mid-morning, I think they called us and said there was... wind direction was changing or something and, if I can remember correctly, it's been a while

INT: Did you talk about this with friends and co-workers?

NAR: I talked with my husband about it.

INT: Did you? With your family?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: What did you say?

NAR: I told him what had happened and was wondering... But then they always said that Carlisle wasn't in danger and I really didn't think about it further, really.

INT: Did you get more concerned later?

NAR: To tell you the truth, I was so busy, I really didn't have time to, I mean, working around the clock and I really...

INT: Can you tell me about that? What was causing that?

NAR: We had to type up some plan - what to do, and notify different municipalities and they were setting up meetings to talk different people and explain what was going on. And we were so busy; I really didn't have time to even think.

INT: So your work was very much affected by it?

NAR: Right.

INT: Can you line out those ways? You were arranging meetings, so forth and so on?

NAR: And doing a lot of typing for Mr. Brozer, a solicitor. And running off copies to give out to the different municipalities. Department heads and stuff. So really I was so busy, I really didn't have time to think about it at the time.

INT: Did you... How long did that last? Can you recall?

NAR: Let me see, Friday... I guess up till after Monday.

INT: You were working all that weekend then?

NAR: Yes. Not around the clock, but I was in and out.

INT: But that's not an ordinary routine?

NAR: No.

INT: The routine was very much disrupted? You people were coming in to work on weekends and so forth?

NAR: Right.

INT: Did you find time at all to follow newspapers or radio or TV?

NAR: I did watch a lot of TV and to tell you the truth I heard more on the TV than what I heard when I was working. I mean, so really you didn't know what to believe and what not to believe.

INT: What was the conflict in the information, then?

NAR: On the news, they were always saying how dangerous it was and yet we heard that it really wasn't anything to really... There was danger there, potential, but yet the way the news forecast it, everybody had to leave right away. And where we weren't informed that the immediate danger was there at the time.

INT: Do you remember what news sources you were paying attention to?

NAR: Mostly Channel 21.

INT: And you were following this at home when you were at home?

NAR: Right, when I was home, I'd sit down and relax.

INT: Would you say you were following this more than you usually would?

NAR: Probably, yeah.

INT: Keeping your eye on things?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: How did you feel about their handling of the situation?

NAR: What the news?

INT: Now you think about it, yeah the news media and so forth?

NAR: I think they really blew a lot of things out of proportion. They really got a lot of people, I think, panicky. We got a lot of calls from different people. What's going on, how comes I heard this and I heard that. And we'd keep telling people if something would come up we would notify them or they'd be notified by different police departments or fire departments when to evacuate if it came about.

INT: Can you remember any of those rumors that they were reporting?

NAR: Down the West Shore we got a lot of calls from different people saying that they had heard that they were evacuating, where should they go. And I said, "Well at this time, there was nothing going on that we're on top of the situation, if anything would come about you'd be notified." Then they wanted to know how they'd be notified and we would say it. Plus we had the Emergency broadcast system, where if anything would come up, everybody'd be notified to turn to that station and we would tell them that way.

INT: Exactly what to do?

NAR: Right.

INT: So you were in a position where you were reassuring people who were quite concerned?

NAR: Right, trying, right.

INT: There are several levels of government officials here. Do you have any opinions about how they handled matters?

NAR: Far as I know, they were all... I really wasn't close to a lot of them. I didn't really go to any of the meetings they had with the people, so I really couldn't answer that, I really don't know.

INT: How about industry? Do you have any opinion about how they were handling the situation?

NAR: They had several meetings with them. Right there in my office and they said that they were concerned about their employees in case something'd come about. How, they would evacuate the employees during the day when they weren't home with their families.

INT: Now this is local industries?

NAR: Right. And they were reassured they'd be given plenty of time to get home to their families. And then a lot of people were a about their school children. Being in school, how they'd... They were concerned that they should evacuate the children all at once or send them home to their parents. A lot of parents worked.

INT: Did you have a good many calls about this sort of thing?

NAR: Yeah, several.

INT: How about Metropolitan Edison? Do you have any feeling about how they were handling matters?

NAR: From different things I've heard and I don't think they're really being truthful to the public. They should have been more truthful and notified them of what was really going on.

INT: And what about for example, the NRC or the National government, do you think they were handling things as best they could?

NAR: I think they were trying to do the best that they could do in the situation it was.

INT: Was there anybody that you particularly relied on? Found that you trusted the kind of information that they had?

NAR: I think Mr. Denton did a real good job of explaining things to the public, what was really going on.

INT: Did you feel that the people over there were in control of the situation?

NAR: I really don't know. They say they were but yet, you don't know how truthful they really were.

INT: In other words, you felt a little uneasy about that?

NAR: Right.

INT: Can you figure what made you feel uneasy?

NAR: I guess different reports you heard about one situation would say, "Things are fine." The other ones would say, "They're not."

INT: The conflicting reports?

NAR: Conflicting reports that make you just wondering what really was going on.

INT: Are they in control now?

NAR: I don't know. I know tomorrow they're going down to visit Three Mile Island. My one boss and several people and so I don't really know.

INT: So you'll probably hear something about that when they come back?

NAR: Right.

INT: Now, overall, we've asked this indirectly, but now I'm going to ask it directly. Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: I was concerned at the time, mainly because of my children.

INT: Can you tell me what you were thinking about there?

NAR: In case, well with the radiation, you never know when children are small. I would never want anything to happen to them. And I guess a lot of parents felt the same way. I really wasn't concerned for myself as much as I was for my two daughters.

INT: If the worst had happened over there, what do you think might have happened?

NAR: Well, I really don't know. As far as the evacuation, I don't know how smooth that would have come of cause a lot of people probably would have panicked. But living in Carlisle they claimed was safe, but yet if the need were to arise I would of, probably left and took my children.

INT: And gone?

NAR: And gone somewhere.

INT: Do you think there was something that would have told you it was time to do that?

NAR: I think if... I'm sure people over there working have families. I'm sure they would have been concerned and I think they would have notified the public if it would the need would have come to leaving.

INT: So that if officials said it was important for you to leave, you would have left the area?

NAR: Right.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was going on over there? Pictures in your mind?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you imagine what the area might look like if something really bad happened there?

NAR: No, I didn't. I never realized what it would... Different people talking, we were talking down at work a couple times, what would happen if everything would blow or something. I really don't know. I don't know what, how everything would look like afterwards.

INT: Do you have some sense of what radiation would do to health?

NAR: Well, I do know they say radiation's not good for you. Like we have x-rays...you know so as far I really...

INT: Do you have any idea what it might do to you?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you make any plans that you wouldn't have made if this hadn't occurred?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you ever think about leaving?

NAR: No. They said Carlisle was safe, so I never gave any thought about actually...

INT: So you don't think anything that actually happened there hurt you in any way?

NAR: No. Just maybe do a lot of extra work.

INT: Were you at all concerned about the food coming from the area and so forth?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: No, I didn't.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: No, not in the round about way. I guess, the only thing I thought was, it's gonna happen, it's gonna happen. If the time's gonna come, it's gonna come.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities during the incident? You've already described one. You felt the responsibility for your children in the eventuality that there was something you would of made moves to ... them.

NAR: Right.

INT: Did you feel other responsibilities?

NAR: No.

INT: You've talked a lot about how your job, your work was affected by Three Mile Island.

NAR: Right.

INT: Is there any other aspect of your work that was affected?

NAR: No. Just a lot of time, working weekends.

INT: You had a lot of things to do that you otherwise would not have had to do?

NAR: Right.

INT: In terms of your job?

NAR: Right.

INT: Did you have any notions of a code of behavior of how you should act in this situation? Were you thinking about adults in this situation should act in certain ways?

NAR: There were several people around that I think blew the whole thing out of proportion like adults. You know you would come down there, they were panicking and I think if they'd been more at ease, I know the situation to them, they were alarmed, but if they'd been more calm, they probably could handle the situation better instead of getting upset.

INT: Did the event bring to mind any kind of past experiences that you have had?

NAR: No.

INT: Any historical events of any kind?

NAR: No.

INT: Would you judge this to be more or less frightening than say a flood or a hurricane or war or something like that?

NAR: Yes, I think it is.

INT: More or less?

NAR: More.

INT: Do you have a sense of why it is?

NAR: Well, a hurricane and stuff or flood, your property is damaged like in a flood, but I think you can rebuild after a flood more than probably what you could in a situation like this. Like coming back after something would happen like nuclear... Be a lot..., be harder to really, you wonder if you want to come back to this area. To your home.

INT: Why?

NAR: Could be contaminated.

INT: Because you think the area might be contaminated?

NAR: Right. I think a lot of people would feel; do you want to bring your children back here. It could happen again, I guess. I mean, it still could happen, I guess. I really hadn't thought about it really happening. You hear so much about Three Mile Island since it happened, I just wonder if they're pointing or are they really still blowing the whole thing out of proportion.

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

NAR: No. I did watch one show on TV; I forget the name of it. The "Red Alert" I think. And I thought it so poorly...

INT: Was it badly done?

NAR: Yeah. And I never saw the movie "China Syndrome."

INT: Did you have any day dreams that you remember?

NAR: No.

INT: Was your sleep in any way disturbed?

NAR: Well, like I say, we worked in here different hours, and I was exhausted. I guess when I did go home and sleep, I just fell over.

INT: Really slept well?

NAR: I didn't have time to think about the situation. I mean, it was a good thing my husband was there to help take care of the children, because I really didn't even see them a lot. Like I usually do on the weekends, spend time with them.

INT: Did you observe changes happen to people around you? Your family or the workers you were working with apart from the telephone calling and so forth, the public reaction that you were experiencing a good deal of?

NAR: No. Even my parents, they didn't even seem alarmed about it. They figure, they live on the other end of Carlisle, so I guess they felt if anything would happen, they would be notified. But they were in no running concern.

INT: Do you think it changed people in any lasting way?

NAR: It probably made a lot of people more aware of the situation with Three Mile Island being down there. A lot of people, like me, I just knew it was there, and I really never paid any attention to it.

INT: Now, you pay a little more attention?

NAR: Right. Well I wonder now if it...

INT: Well, working where you do, you'd become very aware.

NAR: Right.

INT: Do you think it's changed you in any lasting way, apart from that?

NAR: I don't really..., maybe it just made me more aware of the situation and what could happen and what might happen, maybe someday. I don't know.

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

NAR: I don't believe. I've seen different T-shirts, but I can't even remember what they said. This tune... Some of them I thought were... I think one was something about a child or something, which I thought was pretty bad at the time. But I forget what it was,

INT: Have you developed any opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: I guess, nobody can answer that, I guess... I'm not against it. But I wish there'd be more ways that they could regulate it or be more careful with it... But I feel we need it because with the economy and everything growing and stuff.

INT: But it ought to be safer?

NAR: They should have more precautions in the plant to double-check different things. Maybe periodically check different equipment and stuff that maybe this accident could never happen again.

INT: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about all this?

NAR: No, not really. I think we really covered everything.