

Date: 1979

Occupation: College Student

INTERVIEWER: When did you first hear about the Three Mile Island incident?

NARRATOR: I believe it was the day after the accident. Being that I was in Italy I may not have heard about it that day but I know the day after it was all over the newspapers.

INT: So you heard about it from the newspaper?

NAR: Right, and from other Dickinson students who had read newspapers (unintelligible).

INT: What did you think about then, the first time you heard?

NAR: I thought that well, it looks like we might have what we need to shut down what we don't want. Unfortunately that's a nasty thing to say but I was thinking that if it is going to take an accident to prove that nuclear power is unsafe then we had one.

INT: Did you feel it was serious, or did you feel (unintelligible)?

NAR: Oh yes. Immediately I thought it was serious. I felt the whole nuclear issue was serious before questions of safety and non-safety was concerned due to their economic impact. If you want me to elaborate further on that I will.

INT: Go right ahead.

NAR: You see it has become evident to me that nuclear power is not, as far as I can tell, a feasible way for the country to solve its energy problems shall we say, democratically. That may not be the word I want but it involves a highly . . . a very hierarchical beaurocratic corporation and you hire only highly skilled technicians. It does not create jobs for the community. The electricity you buy from a nuclear power plant is not any less expensive than what you would buy from a coal burning or gas burning facility and it does basically nothing for the community as far as help in the job or economic interests because it does not bring new workers and things like that. Plus the detrimental impact of having our energy which is obviously vital need obviously to everyone in the country controlled by a monopoly. Which, you see, I mean, its backed by the government. We are supposedly living in a democratic society which does not allow, and a free market economy, which does not allow these things but, however, that seems to be overlooked it th case of energy and I felt that was a very serious mistake.

INT: How did you feel about the newspapers and radio?

NAR: Well since I was in Italy I found the information I was receiving I felt would be much, much or a better quality than one received in the vicinity of Three Mile Island itself. Because for example the authorities did not have to worry about creating panic in Italy and the ideologies of the newspapers that I was reading were such that they weren't worried about the corporate interests as such as the NY TIMES and the Washington POST who get a great deal of their support from corporations and industries of this type. Not to mention their political affiliations with ideologies that supports this type of industry and this type of economy. Now the papers I was reading . . . some of them were against this type of thing and were therefore very, very interested in giving what they felt were the facts and I was also reading newspapers which were as close to as they can

possibly be, trying to maintain an ideologically neutral stand and coupled with the fact that they, we weren't American and they didn't have to worry about American censorship of information which I think in comparing later information that people were receiving here in the community and information I was receiving in Italy, I felt that it was much quicker you found out what really was going on and how serious it was. Even the first day they said it was a serious thing whereas here in Carlisle there were several conflicting reports, some people saying that there was nothing going on and things like that. Of course you have to understand in Italy most people buy 2 or 3 newspapers a day and read them. And the news is very important and getting the right news is very important. Whereas I would also say the fault also lies in the people in the community who sometimes really don't concern themselves with what's going on around them. They think well, that's not my concern or it is too depressing. They don't read the newspapers and they rely on the television who . . . or radio which is apt to sensationalize or downplay an issue according to how it feels it can create an atmosphere desirable not only to the Television station but to people who control things that they need. They need to be friendly with the government.

INT: Do you think the Italian newspapers had any bias toward the whole incident?

NAR: Some did, yes. Well, there was one who I read continually which was very much against nuclear energy and took a stand against nuclear energy so they were obviously biased and were saying, well here you are and here is America the big pusher of nuclear energy and we are the pusher. We have been giving technology of nuclear energy to all sorts of nations and as you know it was discovered in America or at least it was developed to its high stages by American scientists, generally. I mean there were obviously other scientist from other countries but . . . and then there was newspapers who were at least less biased than some of the major newspapers in this country. As close as they could get it because they weren't involved with the corporations who were building these things and they weren't involved, they just didn't have the same ideology, as I say the NY Times as an example, I don't mean to single out the NY Times, but for example the NY Times as I said they are part of the system that creates the necessity as they see it for nuclear energy. They are part of this system and therefore cannot step back and say . . . well they cannot be objective. Whereas this other newspaper although Italy is certainly not a non—capitalist environment, they do not have the nuclear fever that we have and they can be much more objective and they desire to be much more objective because they're just aren't willing to throw their hat into the ring so quickly. So they were very interested in getting the right information for themselves and for their people. They are more willing than the United States to let the people decide about nuclear energy rather than the "experts" something I think that the American . . . well in the words of Edison . . . I mean he himself said that it will ultimately be the people who decide whether nuclear power is something for us to use or not. He, himself said that this is the people's issue and not the scientists.

INT: So the media in Italy handled it well?

NAR: Yes, I thought so. Very well.

INT: Do you think that the government here handled the incident well?

NAR: No. I think they handled it very poorly because at times there were conflicting reports.

INT: Isn't that the media's fault?

NAR: Maybe, maybe not. They get their information from the government and from investigative reporting. Now investigative reporting found that . . . all right . . . let me sidetrack. For example, the federal investigators who were investigating just how serious the leaks were were taking soil samples around the area of Three Mile Island. They would not take proper samples they would take from certain areas and they would ignore the fact that it just wasn't a widely enough . . . they didn't take enough samples is basically what they didn't do and they slanted the information purposefully so not to arouse public concern. You have to realize that the people who were investigating the incident were working for the commission that is pushing nuclear energy. So they have an interest just in the fact that their existence to make things look favorable in their point of view. And it doesn't look to good for Dick Thornburgh to have to . . . Pennsylvania to be where the accident occurs. That's not good for his public image. That's what they were worried about. Things like that.

INT: One more question about the handling of the incident. What did you think of the industries, Meted, how did they handle it?

NAR: Well, as it stands now they still haven't cleaned it up and it is going to be shut down or maybe it is going to be shut down. They still have krypton gas in the core that they plan to release in the environment. They dumped radioactive water into the Susquehanna and things of this kind. Not being in their shoes, that looks bad. I don't know what their alternatives were but I'm not sure that they adequately . . . you know in a pressure situation they wanted to get rid of the thing so it didn't melt-down. I just wonder if they had the public concern at mind or keeping costs down and alluding the situation as fast as possible to keep it out of the public life. Whether safety was the prime concern or whether other things were strongly influencing their decisions, I don't know. I have a suspicion that it wasn't handled very well by Met Ed. The accident occurred first of all. I mean, they had been warned of defects of this type. I mean there had been similar defects in other . . . it was shown later that it was a defect in design. A lot of the other nuclear power plants were of the Three Mile Island design and were modified after this accident. Right there you have human error in the designing.

INT: Was there anyone who you found particularly reliable? Or anybody whose word you trusted more than others?

NAR: Well my distance from the situation prevented me from much contact. The most of the people I talked to were against nuclear power and I being against nuclear power, I agreed anyway and it was . . . so I trusted most people I talked with just because I agree with their ideas and I had to begin with so I don't think I can really say that it really applies. Do you understand what I mean?

INT: Yeah, I do. I just meant the media, government, industry.

NAR: Well, I have a distrust of the media to begin with, I mean because ultimately they're tied with the things that they are reporting about. It influences the way they report things. And the government, well I think that's obvious, they want to keep things as quiet

as possible. The federal government for example, they are for, nuclear power. Nuclear incident of this kind, regardless of what the public thinks, they want at the same time to keep the public satisfied that nuclear power is safe while, I don't know. . . .

INT: Do you feel that the people in charge were in control of the situation after it occurred?

NAR: People in charge meaning the power authorities or the government or both? Well, as far as the power authorities, I got the impression from the Italian press that it was . . . it looked like it might escalate to a very serious accident. Now whether this was the case or not, one cannot say because as of now I think information is still being repressed and suppressed. And as far as the government is concerned, they took their cues from the experts of course, or the so called experts. And, I don't know. I mean I understood that people were told to stay indoors and close the windows, but if the major gaseous radioactive material were released, its not going to help. I mean, its just....

INT: Is that what worried you most about the situation?

NAR: What worried me most about the situation is, yes of course, the potential loss of life and destruction of a good portion of land which you would not be able to use for a long time. There is a possibility if the wind is blowing you could blow up Philadelphia or New York or Washington. That's very serious. Not to mention the farmlands and the people who live in the area. Having friends going to the college here, that also concerned me. However, one of my major concerns was that the press and the government and this whole structure was going to be able to gloss it over, which I think they have done because I see people walking around and they don't realize that it's still there and it is still radioactive and it is still a problem and most of them say, well, I've forgotten. It doesn't concern me.

INT: You were aware before the accident that Three Mile Island existed?

NAR: Oh yes. I had seen pictures of it and lectures on how safe it was the summer before the accident.

INT: Do you think anything that happened at Three Mile Island might have affected your health or the people living near?

NAR: Well I don't think so seeing as I was in Italy. I don't know if they still have contaminated milk or if the milk was contaminated, etc. etc. etc., But the people living here, for example last night there was five workers in the Virginia nuclear power plant that were contaminated by an accident and I don't think it is beyond reason that people were affected. Of course we can't tell these things for another 20 - 25 yrs. because effects of radiation do not show up and government surveys have been cancelled. They don't last 25 years necessary to find out the true effects of radiation, illnesses caused by these things. They will last 10 years in which no signs will occur.

INT: If the worst had occurred what do you think might have happened?

NAR: Loss of a big great area of land and perhaps life depending on the evacuation. Not to mention crops, businesses, you know, it would have been a blow to the entire area. I hope not many lives would have been lost as a result but if the wind is blowing right, or if

there was a melt down, it could have created very serious problems. It could have contaminated the water supplies which

INT: While you were in Italy you heard about the incident occurring did you have any mental pictures about what was happening or what might?

NAR: No. I don't think so. I had pictures of people sitting at home watching their television and watching picture of this peaceful looking structure and I had pictures of the government babbling away nonsensically and I also had pictures of people streaming out of the area, but then I also had pictures of the thing just blowing right over. I mean, not evolving to anything. So I just sort of, I couldn't really anticipate anything because whatever was going to happen wasn't going to affect me so terribly. I wasn't in the area. That would have changed my anticipations or my thoughts completely.

INT: Did you feel you had certain responsibilities during the incident towards family, jobs or others maybe because you were in Italy and you had access to different information that you should let your friends know about here?

NAR: Well that wasn't feasible because I was hoping that people, for example, most people I knew were at Dickinson, as a matter of fact, 90% of them, if not more, and I felt that school if any place would have the sense of adequately informing the students and I understand that was the case. The school did play a central part here in Carlisle as far as dissemination of information. How good this information was, we won't discuss but um certain responsibilities. . . I felt that should it escalate into a serious problem I was hoping it would not blow in the direction of NY. I have family there and I did feel sorry because I liked this area, but I didn't feel that there was really much that I could do because the only manner of communication I had was telephone and I felt that the telephone lines would be very jammed at that point. And there really wasn't much I could say. They would say, well you are in Italy, and what do you know.

INT: Did you have any ideas about how it would be best to behave in a situation like that if you were here?

NAR: Well, if I had been here. I you see I thought about this a great deal. Had I been here would have I immediately left or would I stayed and how I would have behaved depends on what sort of information I was receiving at the time, whether this thing was going to melt-down and destroy a good portion of the land and people and all or whether it was something not to worry about. Now, as I said, I've been anti-nuclear power before the incident so probably had I been here I would have been all the more vocal now, I think the major effect would be all the more vocal now about being anti-nuclear. That's about the major effect I can think of. As far as being at the incident at the time of the incident, that I really can't say because I don't know how I would have felt. I probably would have felt that I should get out and should have left. . . . not stay. I mean I'm not going to be a martyr.

INT: Do you think that God figured into the incident at all?

NAR: Well, that raises an interesting question. I was thinking about the Amish people who refuse to accept mode technology. I heard their response to the whole thing through the Italian Press and their response was while this is God creation and if God wills it, then its going to happen. They ride horse and buggies and they aren't going to be able to run

and . . . it just would completely wipe out their culture, I figure. And that's about the only thing I thought about as far as religion is concerned — the Amish people and how this would affect them very badly, but I really don't believe in God and I'm close to an atheist, if not anti-religious, but. . .

INT: At the time of the event did any past experiences or past events come to mind?

NAR: Not to me. I had a very close friend who was arrested at Seabrook for protesting nuclear energy and that came to mind. Very, very vividly because his record now states that he was arrested for trespassing or whatever, I forgot, . . . violating the law for something that he believed in and was fighting for something he believed in and I had similar incidents in my hometown. Where I would, people would be protesting against nuclear energy and people would say well that this is not the time or the place. This is the 4th of July of this year, after the incident, and people would say that this is not the time or the place. And I would say, well if the 4th of July when we fought for what we believed in is not the time or place to fight for what you believe in, when is? I felt that fighting for what you believed it was . . . should be an everyday thing. The major thing that came to my mind was the Seabrook, protest, friends being arrested for it. Also another thing that came to my mind was a lecture I received from a physics professor, using slides of Three Mile Island showing how safe nuclear energy was and seeing his face now while he was sitting in Carlisle and the thing was about to blow up, or not blow up it was still highly (unintelligible).

INT: Do you think this incident is more or less frightening than something like a flood or hurricane or war?

NAR: Yes, because, well, maybe not a war. It depends on what kind of a war you have. War you are going to have a lot of casualties, but unless you use napalm and defoliating chemicals and nuclear energy or neutron bombs, you are still going to be able to reclaim the land, if not move people out of the way. In nuclear energy you can't really predict unless you have a very good idea of the winds and how the thing is going to behave and the water and all that . . . how its going to affect the people and how its going to affect the land. If the thing melted down you aren't going to be able to use Harrisburg. Radioactive for some time, I mean the half-life, I'm not sure the half-life of all the life of radioactive materials but just plutonium alone is 24,000 years. Its under 100 years, so you would have to walk around in radioactive suits to live in Carlisle. But you know, a flood, and a hurricane I've lived in hurricanes, they weren't serious ones, but as I say you can still come back afterwards.

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

NAR: No. I'd heard about China Syndrome.

INT: Any books, stories, songs?

NAR: What about Buck Mr. Fuller, who was an off the wall scientist, designer if you will who had designed this magnificent structure of solar heating and thermal heating and recycling for the entire country and I thought about the Manhattan project which my father was a part of which made me very very sick. My father worked for the Manhattan project which gave me a very special feeling of guilt although I'm not my father, of course.

INT: Did you have any daydreams that you remember at the time? Since you were so far removed I don't think that's an applicable request.

NAR: Not that I can remember.

INT: Sleeping dreams?

NAR: No. I didn't dream in Italy. I don't know why, but as far as I can remember I had two dreams.

INT: So was your sleep disturbed in any way by the incident?

NAR: ACTUALLY. Now that I remember. I remember waking up one night feeling that I had been contaminated radioactively. Seriously, I felt I was quite wasted at the time and I drank a lot of wine and other chemicals and I was lying in my bed and I had this eerie feeling, it must have been just the window was open and the breeze was blowing, and I heard this eerie noise which to this day I don't know what it was and I the feeling that a gas of radioactivity had just blown into the house and I don't know whether that was before or after the accident. Probably it was after the accident. But it was sort of subconscious thing.

INT: Interesting.

NAR: I thought so.

INT: Now that you are back here, do you think any of the people around here changed in any way after Three Mile Island?

NAR: I found that . . . yes, as a matter of fact I do. Most of the people who were away from Carlisle were changed by the incident more than the people who were here.

INT: How so?

NAR: Well in Europe it's a much more public issue. Not . . . they believed in fighting for it, or against it actually, much more than we do here and I found a lot of my friends came back and were very willing to fight more than so then the people who were here. And I found people here wearing cute t-shirts, "Hell No I Won't Glow", and things like that which I found sickening. They treated it just as another experience they could talk about and brag about. You know, I lived through Three Mile Island. That sort of thing. But on the whole, I didn't see very much change at all. Dickinson lived up to my complete expectations of how people would behave. Completely unaffected. Do you see any affection? You walk around campus . . .

INT: No

NAR: . . . for example TODAY we're selling anti-nuclear things and giving out anti-nuclear information and 3/4 of the people just walk by and didn't even notice what . . . it was about Three Mile Island. They just didn't care. But it is still there and it is still radioactive and it still hasn't been cleaned up and people still don't care.

INT: Do you think that's because they were here and it calmed down?

NAR: Yeah, that's true. It could be but I just have the preconception that no matter what happened they would still, unless Dickinson was just wiped off the map, things would return to normal. I just somehow knew that that was going to happen.

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

NAR: The biggest thing I found funny was all my friends in Italy, my Italian friends, we constantly told them we were near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and they just suddenly . . . everyone knew where Harrisburg was and Dickinson became a very very interesting thing. That was about the funniest thing anybody ever said. Nobody was very joking about it in Italy. They were very serious about it and a week after the incident there was 19,000 or I don't know, 10,000 people gathered in Rome to fight nuclear energy. And I know there was this Washington thing. I don't know how many people at Dickinson would be willing to do that thing.

INT: Did you see any posters or graffiti?

NAR: Yes. As a matter of fact I did. In Italy there were several posters saying don't worry we are 2,000 miles away. You don't have to worry but we do have nuclear power plants in Italy and do you want this to happen here.

INT: Were there any new words?

NAR: Only what I heard what the Dickinson students were making up.

INT: Which were?

NAR: Hell no I won't Glow and Radiation Vacation and things like that.

INT: Why do you think there was so much joking going on here at Dickinson?

NAR: Why? I think it stems from the general attitude of the students. You know they fucked up again, haha.

INT: Do you remember any joking from other crisis? Like the Kennedy assassinations or Pearl Harbor, Jamestown?

NAR: Yeah, there were, I have friends from Johnstown and they wear t-shirts constantly and they say floods - 3, Johnstown - 0. I 'm sure there were jokes but I think its part of a mentality that I don't really like. So most people that know me very well would just refrain from making any jokes, you know the type of people that I associate with just they wouldn't make any jokes. They would be very serious about it.

INT: Is there anything else that you want to say related to Three Mile Island?

NAR: Related to Three Mile Island? I would like to see more people take an objective look at it. For example, people say we don't have any alternative and I disagree with that. Because the only reason we don't have any alternative is because the people who control nuclear power and oil and coal and things like that, energy, control all of it. Exxon, people like that. Corporations like that they have a human character too. They are very anticalmorphic. They act in their own self interest and don't care what's good for everybody else. They care what is good for Exxon and the nuclear power is very profitable and when you run out of oil you can sell atoms and this is not the case with solar energy and garbage. You can have recycling plants to make energy out of waste and you can have solar energy and everybody can have solar heating panels which they buy from someone who manufactures it, which would create more jobs than the nuclear industry is doing right now. Nuclear power is inflationary, which is a very very nasty claim but if you like to research that and talk to the community for economic

development - Tom Hayden, Jane Fonda - those people and I would like people to say, wait a minute — being anti—nuke is being anti—patriotic — that's bullshit. You are fucked up if you fight for these things because the government says its right and we should believe in our government. I think they are very wrong. We are the people and the future. . our future will be what we the people struggle to make it and I think that I would just like to see a lot more interest instead of people forgetting. More concern —I mean, it affects all of us, whether we live in Harrisburg or Florida or California or Canada or Antarctica.

INT: Or Italy.

NAR: Or Italy.

INT: Is there anything else?

NAR: Not at the moment.