

Date: September 26, 1979

Occupation: College Counselor

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

NARRATOR: I don't know the specific date. When did all of this really happen and then I'll put it in perspective. What dates are we talking about?

INT: Wednesday, March 29.

NAR: Oh, okay.

INT: And... I left that... I had one sheet that had the dates on it.

NAR: It was really the weekend, or toward the weekend before that there were some news articles about possibilities of problems and I was walking on campus with Myra Bernadel and she said, "What do you think about the nuclear problem in Harrisburg?" and I said "What nuclear problem? I hadn't read the paper in two days." And she said "Oh." And then I started reading the paper and looking and I found that there was something going on, when she mentioned that to me, and that was, I think it was really middle of the week before any problems started but it was pretty much...

INT: I know what had happened that weekend before, things had started to happen but they didn't release any information until that Monday.

NAR: Okay, so it was the weekend before that I heard about it.

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

NAR: No, I had no idea. I was telling my husband that that was a fine place for us to move. We had just been in Harrisburg for less than a year when this thing came up so I had no idea that there was a reactor, a nuclear reactor.

INT: What did you think at this point?

NAR: When I found out that there was a reactor there?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Well I was thinking that the nuclear energy business is such a dangerous field for us to be dabbling in and the possibility of, well the possible danger of people, I was thinking a lot of things like not really trusting the... N... What is the name of those people?

INT: Yeah, the NRC.

NAR: Yeah, the NRC. Not really trusting them because I look at nuclear energy as far as any other type of energy endeavor as a money making thing for a lot of people. And I'm thinking that as long as they are making the money they aren't going to be that concerned about anything if it doesn't seem to be dangerous to them, so I was also thinking that they are going to be careless about some of the things that they notice and the NRC may not check the things that they should because they can be simply paid off or they could have friends and all that. I was thinking that there was so much of a human fallacy that could

take place in this whole thing. And we are talking about lives or people who can be harmed by this whole business.

INT: Did you seek out any further information?

NAR: Yeah, mmhm. In fact immediately I started pulling out the papers. I pulled out the Carlisle paper, I pulled out the Harrisburg paper and just looked at the few days beforehand when they really weren't saying that much except there was a reactor down there and there was some possibility and they didn't have any information and rely on us, we will be giving you some more information. So I began immediately my search and also I found out how far I was from the reactor, which is about 10 — 12 miles. And which when it came down to it that 5 — 10 mile radius we were the ones who were most concerned. But I found out how far I was away from it. I pulled out a map and found out where all of the places were that we were talking about.

INT: Did you talk to your friends and family about this?

NAR: Yeah. Well, my friends and family talked to me about it. I was... I got all these phone calls almost immediately after I talked to Myrna in which they were hearing more things nationwide than we were probably hearing locally. And this one friend called me who went to high school, undergraduate and graduate school said "Want to get out of there. Just get out of there, don't trust those people, just come home, you can come and stay home." That type of thing, saying "You trust those people, they don't care about you." It was that type of thing. My parents, my family calling was saying "Were you worried and are you okay?" and things like that. They were pretty calm but they were concerned. I can feel that they were concerned and they wanted to know what we were going to do. They weren't telling us what to do, but they did want to know what we were going to do about it. We reassured them that if we had to evacuate, we of course would, but right now we were just waiting to see what was happening, yeah.

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

NAR: Well, I didn't feel too bad about that because people were just reacting to an unknown and I thought there was a lot of panic especially on campus. When we on campus were going to be used for an evacuation site for some people. I thought we were far enough away not to be concerned but I can understand people's concern because this is something that you don't know too much about. Is the thing going to explode, once the radiation touches your body, you know that's it. It's like years and years before it even wears down so I thought that with the type of information we got which was shoddy, with a lot of contradiction, that people couldn't help but to react the way they reacted, so . . .

INT: How do you think the media handled that situation?

NAR: Well, I thought there were too many panicky media people in the essence that I'm sure underneath they say they need to tell the public what's going on but I think that the statements came out too contradictory, they didn't have enough information so of course they want to tell us something. I'm glad they did tell us something because there were some people who would have rather nothing had been said until the thing blew up and then let's tell all the people to evacuate. So I think from the information they got, that they reacted because they wanted the public to know. But they contradicted themselves too much. They would say something in the morning news, two hours later they would

say the whole community has to evacuate. Two hours later they don't have to evacuate. So I'm saying that I wish they would have gotten more specific information and given us general information until they got specific. Because, I mean, they were down to the wire saying 10,000 people might have to evacuate and if you have to evacuate which was just, wasn't even true. It never even got down to that.

INT: How do you think the government officials handled the situation?

NAR: Mmm... I...

INT: The people at Metropolitan Ed. Those guys.

NAR: Yeah, yeah, and then Thornburg and all those folks. I don't know. I think they were pretty calm about it. I think that once it got down to the point where he was scared he did decide to evacuate pregnant women and those with small children so that shows me that he was even concerned about it and I think that was a precaution that was necessary but once they started doing that, I was thinking that maybe we should evacuate, you know, if they have to evacuate, Yeah, I think that people just didn't have enough information. I got the feeling of almost a cover—up. That people were hiding things from me. If they would get down to the wire and get to the facts, then I would feel more comfortable. But I don't think people had enough facts.

INT: Was there anyone who you particularly mistrusted, then?

NAR: Yeah. I forgot this guy's name from the NRC who came down, no, from D.C. who came down, the guy who President Carter sent down who was representing the NRC. I'd say, what is this guy talking about? He doesn't even know us, doesn't even know the community and you know I think he was holding back too much. I think we could have had more information sessions like what's nuclear energy all about like Dickinson began doing and like some of our professors did on talk shows. Not (unintelligible) but let's inform the public so they at least know. So I really didn't trust this guy because I thought that he was representing the NRC and he wanted to show that they were doing their job. Despite the fact that this horrendous thing had happened and they didn't check on it far enough in advance for it not to happen. They should have been maintaining this type of thing so it wouldn't happen. So I didn't particularly trust him. The governor, the Pennsylvania governor, I just thought he was reacting to what, all he knew. I thought that he was pretty sensitive on TV like he was saying things like let's calm down, let's not panic and you'll get as much information so I thought he was pretty upfront about this.

INT: Do you feel that those in charge were in control of the situation?

NAR: Oh no. I don't think anybody was in control of the situation. I thought it was wild. Nobody knew where to turn. People were very afraid because you are not only concerned about the community and town but you are concerned about your family, you know all these people had families, that was close to the situation. I just thought it was totally out of control; the whole few days.

INT: Do you feel now that those in charge are in control now?

NAR: No, not really, because people don't know where to turn. They don't know . . . we have all kinds of reactions from community people like close Three Mile Island and a lot of other places because people are just responding to the situation and I can understand

that. I still have concerns about the whole nuclear energy and how far are we going, you know, as a human race. Are we dabbling in things that we shouldn't. So even right now, government and other officials don't know where to turn. They want votes so they don't know if they should turn to this group of people who says to close nuclear energy or if they should stress the fact that nuclear energy is needed. Really no one is in control right now. It is just too touchy a situation and it's almost above our heads, when we talk about the possibilities. And this whole thing about nuclear waste, what are we doing with our wastes?

INT: Throw it on the grass.

NAR: Yeah, yeah, that's what I'm saying so we really don't have control of the thing and I just have a feeling like, you know, human beings are going a little bit too far and we're going to pretty much self-destruct ourselves pretty soon.

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

NAR: What do you mean?

INT: Say, from your daily routine or something?

NAR: No, except I had the radio on all the time. Even at night. We would watch the last show on TV and then kind of jump up if there was anything special on a little bit later. Just to be informed. That was the most important thing, to get the information that I needed. I went to work on a regular basis and I got the information at work, but didn't change too much of anything else except getting the information.

INT: Did you, so you say, were you thinking about leaving at any point?

NAR: We weren't thinking about leaving but these friends called us up again from Twanda and said, "Come on, come on and visit us. You can get out of that place. Just get in your car, Wanda, and drive over here." The funny thing is that Will was out of town during this whole incident and I couldn't find him. What happened is that he couldn't get a flight coming in to Harrisburg, but he rented a car. So, he was on the highway for a few hours trying to get in. And the friends were saying, "Forget about Willie and just come on. We'll fix Willie later, just come on." We never made plans. I was thinking in my mind that this would be a nice vacation. In reference to thinking I should leave no. I wanted to wait until there was a mass evacuation. Or that we had to evacuate.

INT: If you had left and there was an evacuation or whatever, what do you think you would want to take with you or would have tried to take?

NAR: Probably not very much. I did think about that whole thing. Like what's going to be left and if this actually happens; we're talking about fallout and we're talking about not coming back to our homes because of the radiation. I was thinking it wasn't even worth taking much; probably only some things to wear. Some clothes to wear because I wouldn't want to go out purchasing. Most things in our house, like personal possessions, I was thinking we might as well leave. Because there would be some things you can take and some things you can't. Just change of clothing — change of underwear and stuff. And pretty much this was all. I would have of course taken my wedding pictures, now, and my two albums. I would have taken some small things but in reference to furniture or larger things... No, I would have left them. And mainly because I thought that things

may have been destroyed and if they were there would have been so much we would have to leave anyway. I think my pictures would have probably been the most important.

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was happening at TMI? While this was going down, they were talking about meltdown or whatever? Did you have any particular mental image?

NAR: Yeah, yeah. Well, I was thinking that people were scrambling around. They were afraid of being in there with all the radioactivity; you know. Kind of like the place was shaking; I don't know why! (chuckles) I was thinking it was about to explode and it was probably shaking; people, you know, just kind of swaying back and forth. That's kind of the impression I got. I really had the feeling that we were going to have to evacuate. I was thinking it was that bad, but we were kind of waiting for the time. I just imagined people with suits on covering their bodies, trying to get the machines working again. Going to mash buttons in their place.

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

NAR: Oh yeah. Yeah, I'm still concerned about the amount of radioactivity that actually seeped into the air. I still feel like there had to be some radioactivity in the air. And right now, I 'm wondering how much, will it affect me later, thinking about a family sooner or later and wondering if there is a possibility of harming a child because I received too much radioactivity.

INT: What other aspects of your life might have been effected in your lifestyle or say in the community in the event of something big?

NAR: I think my whole lifestyle would have been turned about. I would see, if the worse would have happened, I would see us losing our homes, losing a lot of personal things we've acquired that no way any type of insurance or anything else could have recovered that. I could have seen us starting pretty much all over again; with personal type possessions, you know, like homes or anything like that. And I would have seen that as a struggle.

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

NAR: Mmhm, yeah, I thought about it. I, of course, tried to get as much information as I could and I heard from the source like "this cow, this dairy had much radioactivity and no, it's not over the normal amount you would find" and all that. And once I heard that, I felt a little more comfortable. I continued to buy milk, but I was concerned about it.

INT: Did you picture any effects of radiation on the life around you?

NAR: No. I didn't picture any. I thought there could have been a possibility. You know, I imagined seeing these little pieces of radiation in the air and I know I'm breathing it. (End of Side A) On Dickinson's campus, there's one professor from Dickinson who lives a mile from Three Mile Island, I forgot his name, and he had been testing the soil. And he had been testing it since. Yeah, that's his home, I forgot his name, but he's that close to it that was doing some of the testing and I believe I trusted some of the Dickinson folks more than anyone else, and the fact that they were doing some things.

INT: Did you think about your own death or death of others or whatever?

NAR: No. I didn't think so much about my own death. I thought about the possibility of a panic if we had to evacuate, which may have meant say high levels of radiation released at a certain time and a lot of people trying to get out. I thought that possibly I would be the one who got out, that I would just get on the highway. But I thought about people, like older people, who maybe didn't want to leave and said that I don't believe that. I thought about people in nursing homes and other places that might have been slower than others. I thought about traffic jams and people just being back to back trying to leave the area. I thought more about people being contaminated and possibly having problems from that and not from dying; but maybe sickness and maybe long length effects of that.

INT: Did you think about God during this incident?

NAR: Oh, yeah, yeah. I did a whole lot. Basically because of my background and my belief in God. And I attended a church Sunday, the day after that really rough weekend, you know the Friday and Saturday the students at Dickinson left, that Saturday. And of course, that was an issue. And I thought it was a really good sermon. And it was mostly saying that some things are just out of our control. That is what my belief is based upon. We are dabbling in some things that are out of our control; like radioactivity. We as man have the potential of destroying ourselves with the whole nuclear age of nuclear bombs and the possibility. I mean, like Hiroshima, I mean that who business of destroying a whole town or community because you want to. And that bothers me a whole lot. And here we are supposed to be using it for good and there's the possibility still of destruction. I believe as I looked at it, as a warning. God trying to show us, especially in this area and the whole country; it affected all of us. And that you're trying to take too much control. You rely so much on you, that you can destroy yourself. And you should look more towards me. And that was pretty much was a time for me was a time for me to think about things about what was happening. And it was more a spiritual awakening and it wasn't so much fear of being concerned, because if I had died, received some harm from it, I felt fine. But I really felt it was a time for me to think about my beliefs and think about what God may be saying to us. To us as, to us as a people. To what we are doing and not really looking to him. So, definitely, yeah I thought about it. In fact, I initially when this thing first started and the crucial days when people began to panic—I was more worried than anything else. And then looked more towards God. I have no control of this. There's nothing I could do about it. But I know I do believe in the Lord and I know that what ever happens I can believe in that. I can trust in His will happening.

INT: Did any biblical stories or events come to mini?

NAR: Yeah. One thing that crossed my mind was the fact that in the Bible it states that there will be wars and rumors of wars and I thought pretty much about war. I thought about self-destruction, I thought about this whole thing exploding... And it is just pretty much self-destruction. Man destroying themselves toward the end and the chaos that can happen after that. I saw all kinds of people running, just visualizing what could happen if evacuation took place, and people being afraid and people not having any place to turn to if there wasn't God because you couldn't turn to man. So no biblical story but it just kind of came to my mind of self—destruction.

INT: So did any idea of the last judgment or the end of the world come to mind?

NAR: Yeah. Yeah. That part came to my mind. That this could be the end for this area of the country. This could almost be the end because once you die, really that's the end. It may not be judgment for other people but that's the end for you because your physical body is dead, and I kind of thought about that. I thought it was a possibility of say before they can announce that we need to evacuate that there was a big explosion and all of us were contaminated and there was possibility of being infected and thinking that this could have been the end. But in that sense I also thought it was okay. If this is the way it has to be for me and for the other people around me it's okay. But I certainly believed in the Lord and what He has told us about life after death.

INT: Do you think that religious persons and institutions should have taken a public stand?

NAR: You know what? I was thinking about that just lately. Why won't the church be universal or some religious groups speak up because it's all written in the Bible. All of this stuff how we destroy ourselves, or how man will be doomed, this is only a life here, you will be doomed if you aren't saved. Why don't we speak up on national issues and there are a lot of public type television programs like the PTL Club, the 700 Club, and people like that kind of address the issue and address a few current issues but I thought that right after this, that this was an ideal time for religious leaders to speak up because they could. I don't know why they couldn't. And in your local churches, there were some things, and it was almost like only we know, what about the world. Sure we are going to church and we are being told to rely on the Lord and believe in Him because we can destroy ourselves as a people and eventually we will die and there is a possibility of life after death but the world needs to know. I just couldn't believe that no, you know, the Catholics, the Protestants, the Jews, nobody just took a, got together as a form of people saying let's reassess where we are going. Let's look at the materialistic way we are living and look at Three Mile Island in reference to that.

INT: Did you feel that you had any certain responsibilities during the incident or say to your family or job or whatever?

NAR: Toward my family, I thought I should keep them as informed as possible. I wanted them not to worry even though I knew they had to. I looked at national news and said is this what they are listening to in Mississippi so I wanted to keep them informed and let them know that we were okay and we decided we were doing and if we decided to come home it was okay. So I thought in reference to them, they should be informed that we were okay. I wanted my mother to trust. I told her that you brought us up to have faith and believe in the Lord and right now you believe that things are okay here so calm down and don't worry. So my job, yeah, I felt the responsibility of continually coming to work because we weren't closed even though students left, administrators and faculty were still working and I felt that every day that I should. At least come. Really, I thought about taking a vacation. I wasn't that concerned and I just said Willie why don't we leave. But then I thought no, I'm going to work and he didn't have to a couple of days, in fact the federal building closed for a few days, but I felt the responsibility of coming every day.

INT: Did you have any ideas about how it would have been best to behave in that type of situation?

NAR: Um hm. I thought that if people had more of a trust in God they would not have reacted in such a panic, mainly because the panic seemed to be the unknown and if you have a belief in God, nothing is the unknown. It's just something that happens and I look at it as the Lords will. I mean, a lot of people may not but I look at it even if its self destruction and people die, that that is the Lords will and I just think that too many people were too nervous. They were crying and really upset and didn't know where to turn. That shows you the state of the world; that when a situation comes down like this there is no place to turn; no one else. No human could do anything about it if there was a meltdown and the radiation would have actually hit the air. There is nothing we could do about it. And I just think, and I know that's not everyone believing in a certain thing, but I just believe that the calmness would come from your faith and knowing that the possibility of these things happening could occur and that you have something to look forward to afterwards. I think a lot of people were afraid of dying. This just isn't my time. I don't want to die with radiation on me.

INT: It's funny to observe that because in most, it shows you how the United States itself has gotten so far away from God or whatever else they say as a Christian nation, and most times when something came down to a tragedy, you'd find most people, "Oh God, save me" but now you can see that that's not even happening. Things happen, it's just like what are we going to do and turn to the scientists, they'll turn to something but they won't turn to God any longer, which is also shown, to me, in Revelation, showing the end times, we are definitely living in the end times.

NAR: Oh, I definitely believe it. I don't know when. And see, when you talk about the end times, it sometimes could be tomorrow if that's when I die, that's my end time, but I really believe that we as a nation and as the world are living in end times. And we have all the signs. We have all of the wars, all these indications. And then man in, you know, his quest for power is tending to move more toward destruction. And it's going to be proven in different areas.

INT: We have countries that we have, what, a bomb that can destroy all of that country and they have one that can destroy-- I mean that's sick. Something is wrong that someone can build something like that that can wipe out an entire--

NAR: Yeah, it's like this is how I'm going to win the war. I'm going to kill all those people and just wipe them out and that to me is just...

INT: It's just sick.

NAR: It's very sick and the thing about it is that other countries also have that same bomb so we both mash them at the same time. We'll kill them, they'll kill us, and I'm just saying that that's indicating to us the end times. We are getting very close to the end and I just don't see how anyone can't believe that the prophetic laws in the Bible are not going to come through. So many other things have come true already.

INT: At the time did this event bring any past experiences to mind or any past events in your life?

NAR: Well, it did bring to mind living through a couple of hurricanes. It was that type of thing where there was the danger all around you. We were in a shelter at the time but just



the noise and the destruction and the possibility that you could die at any moment according to the tides of the wind and knowing that you don't have any control also.

INT: Do you think that this incident was worse or not so than say a hurricane or flood or something?

NAR: Well I think it had the potential to be worse. It wasn't worse because I was living in a hurricane at the time. I was right there. It just so happened that this building didn't blow down and it just so happened that we didn't drown because of high floods so it had the potential of being and that's kind of my feelings around it, that it was working up to that potential of being just a very destructive type of situation.

INT: Did any TV shows or movies come into mind during this or books or anything?

NAR: Well, I did see The China Syndrome. And I said, yeah, that's what happened to me. Just that and mainly because that dealt directly with the whole situation and the possibility of a meltdown.

INT: Did you at the time find yourself daydreaming at all?

NAR: No, I just find myself kind of visualizing what the potential was. I found myself thinking a lot about say if there was a mass evacuation, the chaos or say if there was a meltdown, the potential of death and I just found myself thinking about the situation a lot. What would happen if this would happen? What would we do and just that type of thing.

INT: Did you have any dreams or nightmares or whatever?

NAR: Not really, but I found myself not sleeping that well, because I would wake up and I would check the news or turn on the radio to see if there was anything happening. I was trying to keep abreast of what was going on. I could fall asleep but I would find myself waking up earlier than usual just to find out if something else happened.

INT: What changes happened to the people around you during the incident? Do you think people changed at all?

NAR: No. For me, at home, everybody evacuated. In my community those people weren't there. And when they came back I just kind of talked to them and they said, "Well, I wasn't sure so I left." But on campus, there were a lot of changes; in reference to students being upset, in reference to faculty and administrators all busying themselves getting more information. And right now I think people are more aware of the fact and I think more people know where nuclear reactors are and more people are mindful of even though they might not be taking sides, but they are mindful of the fact that there are pros and cons of this whole thing and right now I think a lot more people are more aware, especially in this area of the whole nuclear energy situation.

INT: Do you think the incident chanced you at all in a lasting way?

NAR: Well, in a way it got me to thinking. As I mentioned we moved to this area without that wasn't one of my questions, "Do you have a nuclear reactor anywhere?" I just didn't think about it. Where from now on where I go I'm going to ask about the nuclear reactor and the closest one so it got me to at least keeping up with the news in relation to that. It also has me thinking about our bombs that we have in times of war and the potential of killing ourselves. Of all of us destroying ourselves. So I'm thinking about that more now.

INT: Did you hear any jokes or whatever, or graffiti or posters and stuff during the incident?

NAR: No. Afterwards it was more of this We Survived TMI happening here than in my community and things like the people saying well, I stayed, I'm brave and you aren't. I don't think that's necessarily true. You heard more of that around campus and it died down pretty quickly.

INT: Did you think it was funny?

NAR: No. No, none of it was funny and people who were joking knew it wasn't funny even if they stayed here they were concerned. No one can say that they were not concerned about this. They can say that they were just brave but they were thinking about it, because it was something real happening around you.

INT: What do you think your overall opinion is say of nuclear energy at this point?

NAR: Well, right now it is pretty negative; because of the high potential of destruction. I know, I've been looking at and trying to find out some of the positive aspects, but the more I think about the negatives I think we should stay away from it. I'm thinking about even the waste. What do we do with the waste? No matter how safe this reactor is, and how much electricity or how much benefit we get from the nuclear energy, that there is such a great potential for destruction and it is just man's error that can cause destruction. And then, the question that has just never left me is what are we doing with this waste? We are transporting it to one place and then the next place on the highway and then dumping it someplace. There is no place to put that. So that always looms in my mind, and then of course the bombs that we have to destroy other humans and I don't know how that moves toward peace. I just don't see how that moves towards peace. Because there is nothing left.

INT: Kind of ironic.

NAR: Yeah, and so I'm leaning more toward... against nuclear energy.