

September 28, 1979

Occupation: Teacher

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

NARRATOR: On that Wednesday morning, two women were here for the children. One of the girls mentioned that she'd heard that there had been an accident at the power plant.

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

NAR: No.

INT: What did you think about this at this point?

NAR: At first I was rather casual and relaxed. I thought that if there was an accident someone would take care of it. That they were just reporting it as part of the news of the day. If there were any serious problems at a place like that; I rather suspected there would be a civil defense alert. I sort of had the attitude that in small towns, more news is reported than is useful. At first I thought it was just like an event that had happened at a factory. Not an event that could really be dangerous for everyone in the community.

INT: Did you seek out further information then?

NAR: Briefly. Well, we turned on the radio to see what we could find but ours wasn't working well at the time and it was frustrating. We just let it go at that point.

INT: Did you write or talk about it with your family?

NAR: Yes. When my husband came home from work that afternoon, we talked about it. He'd heard about it and we were eager for the 6 o'clock news to come on TV. so we could find out more about it.

INT: Did your attitude change as things progressed?

NAR: Definitely. With my husband's engineering background, he knew quite a bit more about what it meant to have an accident there. So he was very concerned and told me some of the hazards. Right away we started to try to get as much info as we could. We took a much more serious attitude.

INT: How did you feel other people reacted to this?

NAR: Some people around us were very casual. They seemed to be the people that had been in Carlisle a long time. Other people I know were very, very concerned and anxious.

It just happened to be that these people were people like ourselves who were new to the area.

INT: Did you follow the newspapers and the radio and TV reports?

NAR: Yes, we eagerly waited for reports on TV and in the newspaper.

INT: Did you remember any particular sources?

NAR: No, I don't.

INT: How did you feel the media handled the situation?

NAR: I'm still wondering about that. I felt they were doing the best they could. I really felt that we have a great many ways to get information when there's a crisis. So if there was any problem in getting information it was because we didn't have the complete story from the people at the nuclear power plant or others at the time. I think the news media itself had a lot of problems with its workings.

INT: How did you feel the government officials handled the incident?

NAR: I'm still wondering about that too. It seemed like if you get information and they reported it accurately; this is trusting. It was very upsetting when the stories conflicted or people couldn't give a very concise summary of things. I felt that when the government, I mean the NRC, was presenting information, they were much more clear and convincing than Met Ed was.

INT: What did you feel about what Met Ed handled the incident?

NAR: Their one spokesman I saw during the first several days of the incident, I believe his name was Jack, really offended me. I really felt when I was watching him on TV...that he was trying to cover up something. I could not believe him. I really felt he was trying to hand me a line.

INT: Was there anyone that you found particularly reliable or someone whose word you trusted more than others?

NAR: In contrast to this Met Ed man, I really was responsive to Harold Denton. He seemed to view and articulate the problems clearly and crisply. He admitted doubts when he seemed to have them. I really felt I could at least believe what he said. He said when he wasn't sure about something, so, therefore, I felt I could believe him when he did say something.

INT: Other than this person who was speaking for Met Ed, was there anyone else that you mistrusted?

NAR: I can't recall any by name. Also I thought Thornburgh was trustable too.

INT: Did you feel that the people at Three Mile Island that were in charge were in control of the situation? The people working there, did you feel they were right on top of things and in control?

NAR: Oh, not at all. Not at all.

INT: What made you uneasy?

NAR: The things that made me uneasy were the conflicting reports. The fact that we learned info after the fact. They would reissue a statement about what had happened in a period of time that was much longer than it should've been, I felt for the public good and for the public health. Once the NRC came on the scene, I gather from things they did say and the way they made their comments, they didn't feel that those people who worked at Three Mile Island were in control either. And that just reinforced my feelings that people don't know what's going on.

INT: When you look back, do you feel now that they were in control?

NAR: No.

INT: Do you feel that they're in control at this point?

NAR: I really don't have any reason to believe that they are. It's hope and it's expectation too that they've brushed up on any skills that were lacking in the last 6 months, but I have no reason to believe they are more equipped or more skilled to handle it any more than before.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: Definitely. My anxiety increased when on Friday morning they reported that more radio-activity was leaking. And they started to discuss the hydrogen bubble.

INT: Was that what worried you the most? The discussion of the hydrogen bubble?

NAR: I think yes. Seeing that first they really didn't know what they were going to do, it seemed like that was where we had the greatest threat. If there was a meltdown, it seemed like that might trigger it. And be really devastating to this area.

INT: Did you make plans any differently than you would normally have?

NAR: Yes, definitely. When I heard about the more radioactivity being released, I definitely made plans to leave town.

INT: Did you change other ordinary routines?

NAR: Absolutely. Would you like me to describe them?

INT: Yes.

NAR: I analyzed everything that I would need in case the worst happened. My husband and I discussed this briefly. If there was a serious problem what would we need to leave. So I knew where important papers were, forms, life insurance policies, the deed to the house, a few things like that. I picked up a few small items that meant a lot; like a photograph album. I packed a lot of clothes and went to the bank. Got all the money that was available to us. Picked up my husband at his place of work so we could just leave town immediately.

INT: When did you leave and for how long?

NAR: We left Friday afternoon, left Carlisle at noon on Friday, and then we were gone for ten days.

INT: Was there someone in your life that you were watching in order to decide what you would do?

NAR: No, there wasn't one person. There were different people we were speaking with, but really, I would say as a family, my husband and I made our decision to leave. On the Friday morning when we did leave town, I couldn't get a hold of my husband at school, so I just had to make the decision to prepare to go and go.

INT: Did you ever have any mental pictures of what was happening at Three Mile Island and what might happen?

NAR: No. That really wasn't important to me. I became familiar with the diagram they used repeatedly on TV and newspapers and in magazines. But normally when I pictured it, I pictured the towers and not any interior scene.

INT: Did you think that anything that happened at Three Mile Island might have affected your health?

NAR: Definitely. In fact that was my main concern that was my main reason for leaving. Radioactivity could certainly endanger my health and my family's. I was especially fearful for my child since I was pregnant at the time. And I had a little boy who was not yet two then. Because I felt the children were.....

INT: Do you think that it might affect your health in the future?

NAR: Yes, I don't know and I don't expect anyone knows how much radioactivity might have been absorbed cause of the accident. But I really do expect that for myself and for

anyone living in this area, the chances of getting cancer are greater. I guess I believe that's just one of the facts of life now.

INT: Were there other aspects of your life that might have been affected?

NAR: Really once we discovered Friday that things seemed to have worsened and there was a crisis over that weekend. The whole incident at Three Mile Island really governed our lives. We were making every decision according to what was happening there. When we left, we went a short distance, State College. To my sister's house. My mother happened to be visiting my sister there. All of us were planning to even farther to my mother's house in Sharon should things have seemed to be getting worse. If they thought there might be a meltdown. So all of our decisions at the time; economic, social, or anything of that sort were really all based on what was going on.

INT: Do you think the community was affected?

NAR: Oh, I think definitely. In every way. In their mental health, physical health, economic health, everything.

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

NAR: I expect that I for myself would not have returned, because I was afraid. I know my husband works in Shippensburg and that's further away than we are. I expect this area would have been virtually wiped out, devastated. If not visibly, like destroying plant life and that type of thing, I would have considered it unsafe for humans to be around. People's health would have deteriorated over time. All the natural resources in the area. I expect that many people would have left the area and not have been able to return and therefore their jobs, and their possessions would have been just gone. It would have totally changed the lives of all the people in this area. It was baffling to me to consider it.

INT: Did you have any concern for the food or milk in this area?

NAR: Yes. When I came back, I brought water and powdered milk. Cans and made an effort to buy far away dairies milk.

INT: You say that when you pictured the effects of radiation on life around you, you saw the devastation in plant life and people would be able to live there. Did you have real images of this?

NAR: Yes, what I pictured was sort of a film that I saw when I was about seven years old; when there was...I guess that's when the talk started about fallout shelters. I saw a sequence on TV, more than one time, about the mushroom cloud when there was an atomic bomb, and the effects of radiation. And I remembered people kind of cowering, you know, in their little buildings and hiding their eyes and this kind of thing. And the thing I pictured was sort of a surreal image of everything looking fine but being poisoned. It was almost like a fairytale. Like an invisible net over this huge area, looking like

everything was normal but absolutely not being that way. Being, you know, like poisoned and (unintelligible phrase)...

INT: Did you think about your own death?

NAR: Demise yes, but death no (laughing). I would see a tragedy that caused instant death, you know, or fast death—like a plane crash, merciful in comparison to the sort of deaths that would be caused by something like if the worst happened.

INT: Did you think about others dying?

NAR: No, I didn't think about death itself.

INT: What reassured you that you would survive?

NAR: In living here? Throughout, well several things: first of all, the worst did not happen. If it had, I know I would not have come near this area again. No matter how much I lost and how much I liked the things that I happen to have here. I just would not have done that. I wouldn't have returned ever. Fortunately we didn't have to deal with that. Apart from that, one of the single most encouraging things was that we lived on this side of the power plant. If I had lived downwind of the power plant, I think I would have been much more concerned. But we always kind of reassured ourselves that at least we're on the right side, for some...winds. Assuming we get most of our wind out of the west. I realized of course, that the future of nuclear power would be questioned...that plant would be shutdown. I didn't think ahead to wondering if it would be shutdown permanently or not, but I thought well, at least it would be shut down now. I really felt, at least I can go back there. And that, you know, because this accident happened and we've been through this horrible crisis, you know if it ever opened again it will have to be under very drastic circumstances because there will have to have been a huge process of analyzing and revision of the whole thing. So I felt like it was really safer now when it wasn't operating, than it might be in the future, should it open.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: Yes.

INT: How did he figure into this?

NAR: I guess like other things in my life, I wondered what part of...what part this might play in His plan. I really believe that all things do happen for a reason, and I really thought, "Gee, what's He doing here?" (laughing) "And why me and...give me a reason." And also I kind of thought that He would probably try to use it to bring people to Him. And I myself prayed for the safety of people who couldn't leave who were here. For the wisdom of the people who were in control...for people near the nuclear power plant.

INT: Were there any biblical stories or events that crossed your mind?

NAR: My sister and I spent some time that Saturday afternoon talking about this...sort of in a spiritual context. I can't remember any real Bible stories that we recalled to each other...but we did have a whole discussion about that sort of thing. (Unintelligible phrase) That Saturday night my husband's brother died, so our focus did change, although he remained seriously concerned about that. Our focus did change to that particular death. And I guess it distracted us a bit from our own thoughts about death and dying and God in relation to the nuclear...

INT: Did the idea of Satan or the end of the world or the last judgment ever enter your thinking?

NAR: Heard a lot of people speak in the last couple years about prophecies being fulfilled and about their belief that we're the fire and the devastation of the end of the world...might be like what would happen if there was a nuclear accident. But I didn't really think that this accident was part of it.

INT: How did you see or consider the incident at Three Mile Island related in any way to God and his instruction or discipline of mankind?

NAR: As I say, I think He might have used it to make us rely on Him and to pray or return to prayer, as the case may be. I do believe that part of it was just some people making mistakes too; I don't see the whole thing as His disciplining of us. I think it could be that the accident would have been much worse and perhaps He spared us quite a bit of (unintelligible phrase).

INT: Did you attend a religious service during that time?

NAR: As I say, we've been visiting churches, and we were going just about every Sunday. At the time closest to that, I guess the next religious service we went to was my brother-in-law's funeral.

INT: So there wasn't really any mention of it?

NAR: No.

INT: Does your faith say anything about the rightness or wrongness of man's desire to use and control atomic power?

NAR: Well...since I don't consider myself part of any particular church right now, I can't answer that. As far as the faith that I was brought up in, I'd say not as far as I know.

INT: Do you feel like religious persons or institutions should take a public stand regarding the use of atomic power and human development?

NAR: Will you repeat the question?

INT: Do you think religious persons and/or institutions should take any public stand, either for or against, on human development and the use of atomic power?

NAR: I don't know if it's the place of religious institutions to do that. Although I really think it behooves people to make good use of their resources and behave responsibly...I think if you're going to look at things from a religious point of view those things are parts that we must be responsible beings, we must be good stewards, you know, in the Biblical sense, and we must care about our brother and we've got to look out for each other. And encourage each other to be thinking, caring people too. So in that sense I think religious people should be involved in thinking and doing something about this, but I don't know if it's the place of churches or religious leaders to do that sort of thing.

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

NAR: Yes. Well one thing that I felt I should do is get as much information as I could. I thought, number one, I have to be as well informed as I can so I can make some decisions here. And at times it was difficult to feel like I could be well informed. Second, I felt I had to do, based on that information, anything I could for the health of my children. And I would say those are the big things. I guess the latent one, at that time, I realized I'd have to learn a lot more and be much more concerned about how energy/land conservation and use of energy, and I'd have to give more attention to things like that. I hadn't really thought about a great deal about nuclear power before.

INT: You talked about the things you had to do when you were preparing to leave. Were there other things that you had to do that you don't ordinarily, other than the preparation to leave and the extra listening to the media?

NAR: No, I can't think of any.

INT: Added responsibilities?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any ideas about how it would be best to behave in such a situation?

NAR: Yes, my brother loaned me and gave me some advice about this sort of thing because he lived in Kent, Ohio at the time of the Kent State University incident when the four students were killed. He lived directly opposite the campus. He called and reminded me that in some crises people tend to panic and they don't think well. He encouraged me to leave before any civil defense people or National Guard was called in because he said I'd have more choices to choose my own course. If it really came time for an evacuation or something like that, I'd just have to sort of go where they told me and I'd have just a certain prescribed amount of time. So I thought through some of that aspect and that helped me a lot in thinking, yes...this is going to be a different

situation...we'll have to make sure we number one get information, two have our priorities straight and at that time it was health and survival—getting away, and I was very willing to make choices if I had to between choosing between possessions to take if I was just going to see a small fraction of my material possessions again or not. And I was just trying to prepare myself for making decisions and for sort of taking care of first things first.

INT: At the time did this event bring to mind any past experience or past event?

NAR: Well, I mentioned discussing the atmosphere at Kent State after the students were killed, and of course at that time I had talked with my brother about it and so my husband and I discussed that. And I guess we discussed some of the atmosphere of the sixties—just how groups of people behaving in rallies and things like that. And we also mentioned how unobservant we've been—anything about that sort of thing—when we observed other tragedies on TV we hadn't really paid attention to what the people were doing to be able to cope a little better. Maybe it's just a matter that that's not presented usually...but we realized that as a community we were pretty unprepared for dealing with what we might have to deal with.

INT: Did you see this incident as similar to anything else in your life?

NAR: No, this was really for me, quite a crisis in the sense of kind of a life and death situation—a very big event, not anticipated, something totally out of my control, you know, just all those things that made it very unlike my normal day-to-day life. However I kind of felt like well, guiding principles will always be guiding principles, you have to remember ideas of first things first and you just do what you can, always do what you can and then let you go so that frustration and that sort of thing doesn't get all...

INT: Would you say that the incident was more or less frightening than...

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SECOND SIDE OF TAPE, CONTINUED...

NAR: During the time that it was going on, it was probably as frightening as any of those things. I think the things that make it different, though, is that for the future it makes it more frightening. You can't...when it's all over, when the hurricane's gone, when the floodwaters have receded, and you can see the sun, you can look around and assess the damage. We can't do that here. At least for our own health. I guess you never can and you have situations for mental health. People try to put a figure on the economic impact but for our physical health we'll just never really know. The next generation will know. At the time, any of those events must be so overwhelming that they would all be about equally frightening.

INT: You mentioned earlier that when you were a child you saw on TV things about fallout shelters, was there anything else in the way of TV shows or movies that came to mind?

NAR: Let me think. I guess more than specifics, I remember that era of fallout shelter discussion. I remember diagrams, lists of supplies that should be in the fallout shelter, signs being posted, locations of civil defense safe areas, and I remember thinking how difficult it was to be in a safe place because of the nature of radioactivity. I believe the name of the story is *Come Spring Rains*, something like that, it might be by Ray Bradbury or contemporary like that, made me think of this short story where the world goes on and an alarm clock starts the day and the percolator makes the coffee and all these machines are working at home but no one is there. My images were not science fiction type images, but this kind of I think of it as (surreal)? Eerie.

INT: Did you ever find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: Gee, I don't think so.

INT: At the time did you have any daydreams that you remember?

NAR: I tried to daydream as a form of rehearsal of what I might do. At times during that week when the bubble was still there and they were using the word meltdown, I thought about returning from State College to pick up things here in Carlisle and I kinda rehearsed doing that. I tried to think, if I returned to the house, what would I get. I also rehearsed scenes of returning later after the accident or trying to adjust in my mother's home if I could never return. I sort of mentally tried on different scenes to try to guess how it might feel. I also...one of the things that I guess kept us from returning on that weekend was we didn't want...well my husband was thinking of returning home and picking up some possessions, we didn't want to be separated. We found...we felt it was very important to be together and physically close at that time and it was a horror for us to think of him coming down here and being caught up in an evacuation situation where he would be told to go to another particular place.

INT: Have you had any daydreams since that time regarding the incident?

NAR: Yes, I guess so. Some of them were related to seeing the movie *China Syndrome*. Sometimes when I read a news report about the accident and about Met Ed it makes me mad. I kinda do a mental block. You know—voodoo doll that I stick pins in. I really have negative thoughts about Met Ed and the people that I can't name but I imagine to be lying to me. I guess I sorta had some negative daydreams about the powers that they control—nuclear power plants and I've kinda wished their demise and the upswing of a grass-roots movement to shutdown the power plants.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams at the time?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you feel that your sleep was disturbed in any way?

NAR: Yes, it was difficult to get to sleep.

INT: What changes happened to the people around you during the incident?

NAR: I would say we went through an extreme experience. There was just no two ways about it. I really felt like I had just been absolutely through the mill. We were building our lives around the TV set, wondering how's the bubble and I felt like everything was very touch and go for a period of time and we were just emotionally through the mill.

INT: Do you think it has changed anybody in a lasting way?

NAR: Yeah, because of it being extreme, you don't say, well that's over, that was 6 months ago. I think we are all very different because of it. At least in our mind we thought about it. We've been forced to think about the things we haven't thought about, but more concretely, I know people keep more supplies of different things on hand, maybe we rethought about or revised plans for something like this or some other sort of disaster or difficulty. We thought about should an opportunity ever come for a job to leave the area, how much of a factor it would be. We might live closer or further away from a power plant. I think I could go on quite a bit about how people are different. I hope physically we are not too different but I assume that some of us are to some degree. I hope people are using energy differently. I know it motivated me a lot more this summer when I didn't feel like it to hang clothes on the line. Those are some of the first things that come to mind. I guess it has made me feel a little bit more radicalized too. It's another lesson in don't trust the power plants, its kinda like Watergate that we cant assume that the other people are going to do the best they can or know how to take care of everything. It has left me with a skeptical point of view about government commissions, government preparedness; scientific expertise; it just goes on and on.

INT: Did you ever hear any of the jokes that were being made about radiation at Three Mile Island?

NAR: I don't think so.

INT: Did you see any of the t-shirts or posters?

NAR: Well, yes, I saw them. My first reaction was, "How could you?" That was like a wound to me. I couldn't imagine someone wanting to wear something or put it on their car to remind people. Not that you don't want to think about it, but I just...I didn't get it. I didn't get it...I survived Three Mile Island...huh? Did you? I just didn't get it. You survived with what consequences? I could just not anywhere figure out why people would make or buy any of the memorabilia, so to speak.

INT: Why do you suppose there was joking going on?

NAR: I guess its black humor. It's just not my style.

INT: Do you remember any other crises where there was joking, maybe with Guinna or Pearl Harbor or Kennedy Assassinations, could you associate any humor with them?

NAR: I'm not a joke teller, so I don't remember stories particularly well among my friends, people who know us and a couple would tell a joke more readily to my husband than to me. He likes to collect stories. I do think when there's a crisis or a difficulty that people like to collect stories and they relieve tension that way and that's fine to a point. Sometimes it's fine and sometimes it seems like bad taste. It's just one of those sort of gray areas. As a matter of fact when you mention (unintelligible) I can't remember any jokes about Three Mile Island or all those other situations.

INT: Have you developed an opinion now about nuclear energy?

NAR: Definitely.

INT: How do you feel about it?

NAR: I feel that it should be very guarded. We really know much less than we thought we knew. I really don't have a scientific background but I've had great respect for scientists. I feel that they have a great deal of responsibility and I hope they take it seriously. As far as nuclear power itself, I really feel that we shouldn't use any of the power plants until we go through reexamination and revision process to check out the plants again and again and again to make sure they are safe and to build in more steps so that there are safeguards. I think that even though we are dependent upon it in some areas that it would be very easy to cut our energy usage by 10-15% so that we wouldn't need that amount that is currently produced by nuclear power. I think we've just never really got serious about any types of conservation. Even now with this accident, I have a suspicion that most people don't use energy all that differently. They complain that it costs too much and maybe they'll watch light bulbs a little bit but we haven't really started to rearrange our lives seriously so I think the use of it...if it was possible right now I would shut down the plants til we get them safe and I realize that that would be a very big process and I would call for all kinds of measures to get people to conserve from humble things like hanging clothes out to using as many kinds of other energy as possible, building windmills.

INT: Is there anything else that you would like to say?

NAR: Yes, there are a couple things that come to mind that were part of my thought. We have some close friends and family in other areas and one of them who lives in New York State was very concerned for us and had a lot of empathy with us going through this crisis. I enjoyed talking to him and had some long conversations with him about what was going on here and in fact, he and my husband started to talk about a study that they might do since my husband works in the area of speech and communications. He wanted

to do some communication studies. He was planning to interview some of the evacuees at Hershey and interview some local residents. A friend was going to do a parallel thing in New York State and there was a follow-through on that because of my brother's death. He had to abandon those plans. However a friend in New York State did start some interviews, he's also a college professor so he started talking with people in his department and I believe he asked his students to respond to a questionnaire, and for the most part I think he found that people were unconcerned. He was going through the incident emotionally with us, and thinking in larger terms of what does this mean for our country because we have all these nuclear power plants, and he felt that to those people in his area it was...yesterday it was Guinna, today its Three Mile Island, tomorrow it will be something else and in hurricane season it will be that. It's just another news story that you watch and say tsk tsk to that and say that's s too bad, but it really doesn't have any effect on your life because the main thing he found there. They do not live particular close to a nuclear power plant in his town. But we found some of that with family too. Some people seem to feel well that's too bad that you went through that but economically we really need it. It's like you went through it but that's a fact of 20th century life. There are so many cars on the road, there are going to be so many accidents, so I was a little taken back to run into these attitudes. We are naïve to think that people wouldn't have these but somehow we felt that they might see the world differently after Three Mile Island, and that wasn't so. The other thing is that it's still curious to me that around the neighborhood people aren't concerned about what's being done there. It doesn't seem to be a cause for concern anymore. Three Mile Island is over in the minds of most people, as far as I can see. I attended one Three Mile Island alert meeting in Carlisle and I asked to be on their mailing or phone list so that I can become a part of it. Apart from a friend who is more involved with that I really don't know anyone who is going out of their way to keep informed on what's happening with our power plant or nuclear in general and that's very strange to me. I don't know if I'll live here all my life or not, but if I expect to I'd be more of an activist than I am. I expect to get more involved in Three Mile Island alert group. As I get more information I'm much more concerned. I could imagine for example or I'd be pleased to see something in the Harrisburg Sunday Paper or the Weekly Column in the Carlisle evening *Sentinel*, an update on Three Mile Island news. What people are doing as a regular thing so people would know where to look and keep informed. I think it should be a much more dominant issue. It's just curious to me that it doesn't seem to be. Maybe (unintelligible phrase).