

Date: October 2, 1979

Occupation: Physician

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

NARRATOR: March 27<sup>th</sup> I think was the day. And I heard about it when I was working, as a matter of fact I have a radio in my office. The first thing that caught my ear was that they were telling people that lived near Three Mile Island to close their windows. That got my interest, and I then learned what happened, basically. So I guess it was around one o'clock on March 27<sup>th</sup>.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: So, you had an idea of distance wise how far it was?

NAR: Yes. And I used to fish below it. *[Laughs.]* There's a reservoir behind it.

INT: What did you think about initially at that point?

NAR: I was very mad. Very angry.

INT: You were mad that they had allowed it to happen?

NAR: Yeah, that something like that could happen. You know, that there weren't more safeguards. I was really upset about it.

INT: Did you feel it was a real serious situation?

NAR: Yes. Yes I did. Yes.

INT: Would you have called it crisis?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you then seek out further information?

NAR: Indirectly, yes. I read as much as I could in the news. I met some people in Carlisle who were on disaster teams, and I sort of kept informed as to how things were through them, although the information to them was very vague also. And we also had Geiger counters in the hospital that were used for other tests, and to sort of monitor things here. So yes, I tried to seek out other information.

INT: After talking to friends or family or co-workers, did your attitude change at all?

NAR: Do you mean in regard to pre-TMI versus post-TMI?

INT: No, as to when you first heard about it to after – the more you discussed it, kind of how did you start to feel.

NAR: I felt a little panicky. I felt very concerned for my family. That was probably my biggest concern. 'Cause I have two small children. And I was very concerned about their future, actually.

INT: How did you feel other people were reacting to the incident?

NAR: That was mixed emotions. I had, in my occupation, the people that I saw – half would be apathetic, half would be very concerned. I found that those that were apathetic usually were older people and the young families seemed to be more concerned.

INT: You said that you followed the newspapers. Do you remember watching a television or listening to the radio more than usual?

NAR: Yes. Yes. I made a point to watch T.V.

INT: Were there some sources that stand out in your mind as being really noteworthy?

NAR: Yeah, *[laughing]*, ABC News was a very dramatic one – I'm trying to think of the name of the reporter. Yes, they presented it as a gloom, sort of a gloomy report. And very serious reports. Every night, they would give you an *[unclear]*, you know, he would come on the T.V.... *Ullch!* It was terrible.

INT: How, in general, did you feel that the media handled the situation?

NAR: Well, I think the media did their job. I think they... A lot of people say they were sensational, but I don't think so. I don't remember reading anything that was false. I think that when Denton got on board, things were much more relaxed than before he came on board. But I think the media did a good job.

INT: You mentioned some kind of reassurance when Harold Denton was there...

NAR: Yes.

INT: ...did you feel the government officials on the whole were doing a good job during the incident?

NAR: No. I felt that Denton did. I don't know, maybe it was just his personality, that he seemed to be the only one that had control, and he was the only one that really didn't fantasize. He was very honest. I thought he was.

INT: I think he impressed a lot of people that way. How did you feel the industry, that being Metropolitan Edison, handled the incident?

NAR: Yes. Lousily. Very negatively. From what I read. But, you know, every day you read more, and the thing that really irritates me is that everyday we read how much more exposure we had. And every little incident they have is non-threatening to the public. But how much is, how much little ones build into to a big one? That bothers me. Even now we have, what, thirty-five days before the contaminated water starts leaking out into the river? So once again, another crisis.

INT: Was there someone that you found you could particularly trust during this period for information?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you mistrust everyone in general, or...?

NAR: No. I... As things were going on, you keep wondering, as I told my wife, what are they going to say a year from now, about how high the level of radiation was? It's like Vietnam. Now we're finding things out about Vietnam we didn't know. It's like anything else that happens. You find out later. I... It worries me.

INT: And it was hard for you to trust anybody at that time.

NAR: Yes. Yes. And even yet.

INT: And even now. Did you feel that those who were there in charge were in control of the situation?

NAR: That I can't answer. I don't know.

INT: Was there something that made you uneasy?

NAR: About...?

INT: The people working there, whether they were in control?

NAR: No, no. That I don't know. I don't know the qualifications of the people in there were.

INT: What worried you most about the situation?

NAR: My children. The future of them, living this close to TMI, I guess. You know, are they going to get leukemia? I'm in the business, but I'm still a family man. And I'm still a parent. And I wonder, you know, is their future going to be threatened by this? And it

bothers me when they're doing studies now, about this whole area. To see how much of cancer we'll get and so on. I wasn't concerned about myself, nor necessarily my wife. But my kids I was very concerned about.

INT: Did you make plans any differently than you ordinarily would have? During that time?

NAR: No.

INT: So, you didn't change any of your ordinary routines?

NAR: Not my own, personal. We did not allow our children to play outside for a few days.

INT: Did you ever think about leaving the area?

NAR: No. But I thought about sending my family out. I cannot leave the area, because... I have responsibilities that I couldn't delegate. And so, I was here no matter what. And I knew that. I had, you know, responsibilities at the hospital, so I couldn't have left. No way. But I had thought several times about sending my wife and kids out.

INT: It turned out that they did not go away?

NAR: They did not go. No.

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

NAR: Not someone. I consulted my in-laws, who I have a very good relationship with, about the situation. Yeah, I consulted them, because it was family. And I asked them what they would do. I was going to ship them there; but they live southeast, so...  
*[Laughs.]*

INT: That's a bad direction.

NAR: Yeah, so – *[laughs again]* They were better off here.

INT: Did you ever have any mental pictures of what was happening at TMI?

NAR: Yes.

INT: What did you envision?

NAR: I envisioned a reactor core. Like a pressure cooker. And, I had this idea of a big pressure cooker, with a nuclear reactor inside, and a big gas bubble getting larger and larger or it was going to explode. So it reminded me of a pressure cooker, basically. And

that's the way I envisioned it, as a large spherical item with a very hot center and boiling water. And high pressure.

INT: You mentioned your concern about the children perhaps developing a problem, did you ever think about any concern to your health in the future?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: My own professional life here, it was altered. Personally, no. I didn't change any habits or anything, I carried on the way I always do.

INT: Could you tell me a little how your professional life was altered?

NAR: Well, several of my patients left the area, that had appointments, and didn't show up. I had several phone calls from people who had children asking me if they should leave or not. That's about the biggest thing.

INT: What was your advice to most people?

NAR: I told them to – you know, I had nothing to base it on, I just said that, I'm following the Governor's edict, and that that's all I had to base it on. And if they were pregnant or with children or within the five-mile radius, I told them they should leave. And outside that, I just said no, that I wasn't recommending that. But I had – see, once again, there again was the old question, who do you trust?

INT: Did you think that you reassured them at all?

NAR: Yes, I think so. Yeah. I told a lot of people in the area, I told them my family was here, and I wouldn't have left my family here if I really thought there was a threat.

INT: I'm sure that did make them feel better.

NAR: Yeah.

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

NAR: If there had been a meltdown?

INT: Do you think that would have been the worst thing that could have happened?

NAR: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I think that would have really have been devastating.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Did you picture in your mind, any effects of radiation on the life around you?

NAR: Ummm... No, but my neighbors did. They did not harvest their garden because of that. I did not feel a threat. And I eat *[unclear]*. Yeah, we better – *[Break in tape]*

*[Tape resumes]*

INT: Did you ever at any point think about your own death?

NAR: No.

INT: What about that of others?

NAR: No.

INT: What made you think you think you would survive, what reassured you?

NAR: *[laughing]* I really wasn't that reassured, actually.

INT: But yet you didn't think of anything as fatal, or as...?

NAR: No, I sort of... I didn't think fatalistic. I wasn't sure if I would survive or not, but I didn't worry about that. That's one of the hazards of our job. *[Laughs.]* You know, I didn't even think about that.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: Well, I always think about God. Yeah, I mean, sure. I said prayers...

INT: But as tying into this somehow?

NAR: Oh, sure. Yeah. I don't think God *caused* it. But I think my faith probably was somewhat, uh... strengthened. Yeah.

INT: Did you attend a religious service during the crisis?

NAR: Regular Sunday service, yes.

INT: Did anyone there speak about TMI?

NAR: No. Well, I mean, after the service, yes. But not before then.

INT: But not as part of the service?

NAR: No.

INT: Did any biblical stories or events cross your mind?

NAR: No.

INT: What about the idea of Satan or the Last Judgment or the end of the world?

NAR: No. No, no.

INT: Did you notice more or fewer people at the service than usual?

NAR: No.

INT: About the same?

NAR: Yes.

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

NAR: No. Not that I'm aware of.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: What position should they take and why?

NAR: Well, *[laughs]*, I feel as though... I think they should take a negative view, and I think more emphasis should be placed on other natural resources. I don't think that solar energy has even been tapped, and electrical energy hasn't been tapped, and coal certainly hasn't been utilized, and wind, go to the ocean and see the tide, that could be harnessed... I think there are alternatives to what we have, and I don't think they have been exploited, and when I first saw the thing, I thought of like – like the Vietnam people were saying, “Get out of Vietnam,” but there was no alternative. But we have an alternative. And money is the only object. And money is dead wood. It's paper. So I don't feel that we should try to use anything that you can't control. You wouldn't start your car if you couldn't turn it off. You wouldn't light the garbage to burn it if you couldn't put it out. I feel it's a very dangerous – I think there are several reasons why we shouldn't have nuclear energy. Waste products for instance.

INT: And you feel that somehow religious institutions or persons could play a role in bringing about this change?

NAR: I think so. Yes. I don't know if they should wave flags and protest, but I think that religious groups can certainly have lobbyists and they can have influence on people. But I would say that more as a personal opinion than anything else. I'm willing to get anybody into the act, really.

INT: Who's willing to get into it.

NAR: Yeah. But I think basically that it is a very dangerous source of energy. I think it's convenient for now – you know, we're having an oil shortage, and I think it's very convenient. Kind of “nobody's budget has to hurt, we'll just put up some more nuclear reactors”, but eventually – what are you going to do with the waste? That's the problem now. even. We're destroying land. And people. There's a town somewhere out west that's radioactive, isn't there?

INT: I've heard something about it, I don't know the details, yeah.

NAR: Yeah. Sidewatch, or DeSmit *[?]*, or something, is radioactive. That worries me. That really worries me. I never used to be involved with pollution, never used to think about it. But I'm very aware of it now. I don't throw paper out the window anymore.

INT: Just since then, just since this incident?

NAR: Well, it's made me more aware. I would be very hesitant to do that now, where I may have been lacksadaisical about it, or I may, um, have taken gasoline and just thrown it out in the yard. Things like that, so I'm much more aware of environmental things.

MT: Oh.

NAR: That sounds weird, doesn't it?

INT: No, I think that probably that's a good reaction to come out of something like this.

NAR: Yeah, it's a positive thing, I mean, I'm not...

INT: It's made you really aware of lot of things.

NAR: Yeah. I'm not really criticize the government, I can understand why they're shooting for nuclear reactors. But it really scares me.

INT: You mentioned your responsibilities as a physician and those toward your family, did you feel that any of these conflicted?

NAR: Yes. I as a physician had to stay here regardless, and it would have been very difficult for my wife to have moved my children by herself. And if there had been an evacuation, I wouldn't have gone. Myself. My wife would have gone alone. And that was conflict. That's always a conflict in this business. Home verse your responsibilities. But if I were to have left, somebody might have died. Directly attributed to me. And I couldn't do that.

INT: So how did you resolve the conflict?

NAR: Well, I didn't have to.

INT: She didn't have to leave.

NAR: No, we didn't have to go.

INT: So there was just the possibility of it being a conflict.

NAR: Possibility that she could have gone, yes.

INT: Did you have to do things that otherwise you would not have had to do?

NAR: No.

INT: Didn't have to extend hours, or see more people?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: Yeah, I have ideas as to how we should behave, but I don't think they would have been adhered to. I think if there would have been a twenty-mile evacuation carried out, I think there would have been more...hell than this. I think people would have panicked. Because at times through this whole thing I would feel very panicky, if I were to watch the news continuously, I felt very panicky. And I thought, if I were to feel that way and they said "get out" – I wonder what the highways would have been like? What the gas supplies would have been like? We should be very calm and follow directions, but I don't think so, I think it would be survival of the fittest. And that's where the conflict came with my family. How my wife would have survived that.

INT: Was it hard for you to stay calm throughout this?

NAR: At points, yeah. At points it was. Not calm in a sense, that panicky feeling was inside, that panicky feeling. I never demonstrated any panicky feelings, but I felt them at times.

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

NAR: No. I think I would have likened it to being in a war zone. It may have been something like that.

INT: So nothing like that had ever happened to you personally before?

NAR: No.



INT: What about in history? You mentioned a war, that you sort of thought that it was like what people experience who are living through a war?

NAR: Well, I guess the people in Hiroshima went through this. And I'm sure that their offspring are suffering because of it. Not something, I mean, that was more tragic than this, but I would imagine that they felt that way. I guess there is someplace in Russia where they had this happen. There was a meltdown somewhere in Russia. I read that anyway.

INT: Wow! I didn't know that. That must be privileged information. Would you say that this incident was more or less frightening than a flood, or hurricane, or a war?

NAR: More.

INT: More frightening than all of those? Why especially?

NAR: Yes. The silent nature of radioactivity. The unknown. The invisible, the odorless. And, you know, where do you run? *Should* you run? Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

INT: Did any T.V. shows or movies come into mind?

NAR: No.

INT: You hadn't seen *The China Syndrome*, I guess?

NAR: No. *[Both laugh.]*

INT: I hadn't either.

NAR: I'm glad, too.

INT: Yeah, I don't think I'd ever want to... What about any books or stories you might have read?

NAR: No. Didn't remind me of anything.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: No. *[Laughs.]* No.

INT: What about, did you have any daydreams that you remember at that time?

NAR: No.

INT: What about any sleeping dreams, at night?

NAR: No. No.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed in any way?

NAR: Not the least bit.

INT: Not to walk up, and listen to the news, or anything?

NAR: No. *[Laughs.]* When I sleep, I sleep.

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

NAR: I think people are more aware of what nuclear reactors are and what they can do. I think an awareness of nuclear energy and radioactivity, probably more than anything else.

INT: Do you think that's changed them in a lasting way?

NAR: Yes.

INT: ...that's not just temporary, that people will continue...?

NAR: No, I think that's gonna be a permanent thing.

INT: Did the incident change you in a lasting way?

NAR: Yes.

INT: By making you really conscious?

NAR: Conscious and against nuclear reactors, the development of nuclear energy. I was apathetic prior to this incident, and now I am an anti-nuke. I'm not an activist, but really am against the development of nuclear energy.

INT: And yet as a physician I'm sure you still view the good things that radiation therapy can do.

NAR: Yes, but that's different than a reactor. I can control cobalt.

INT: You feel like that's really putting it in its right uses...

NAR: Yes. That's confining it, yes. An X-ray is confined. And I have no objections to nuclear reactors if they are small and controllable, but I'm against nuclear reactors that you can't control. We can control X-ray, and cobalt treatment we control, but you can't control nuclear reactors. Most of the time you can, but sometimes you can't. And that sometimes worries me. *[Laughs.]*

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

NAR: Not really. No.

INT: What about any of the graffiti, or posters, T-shirts...?

NAR: Oh, sure. "I Survived TMI", sure, I've seen those. And I've seen a lot of Anti-Nuke T-shirts, you know... a lot of Johnny Carson jokes. There was, I forget what he said, there was something about, they wanted to trade TMI for Los Angeles or something like that, it was some...I heard that.

INT: Some great exchange. When you heard some of those, like "I Survived TMI", if it was meant to be funny, did you laugh?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you not think that it was amusing?

NAR: I don't think that's funny. No.

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

NAR: Sometimes the way people handle anxiety is to laugh about it. That's the only thing I can think of. I think there was also money to be made, by people putting out those things.

INT: Did you ever remember any joking from other crises, like the Kennedy assassinations or Jonestown, Guyana? Can you remember jokes from any of those eras?

NAR: The Jonestown, yes, I remember some of them, but I can't remember what they were, but yes. I remember that one. I don't remember the flood, I don't remember anything about that. And definitely not about the Kennedy assassination, I've never heard any jokes about that. It was like you'd have to be in Washington D.C. that day. That was a frightful experience.

INT: So you feel that you have developed a definite opinion now about nuclear energy? Would you like to elaborate on that?

NAR: No, I think I already have. *[Laughs.]*

INT: You feel like you covered everything that you would want to say?

NAR: Yes. I'm not going to be waving flags and I don't push my opinion down other people's throats. That's just my own personal opinion.

INT: You'd like to see some other sources tapped, and worked on?

NAR: Yeah, I think so. I don't think we will, I don't think – I'm not sure why we haven't. My brother-in-law sells the solar energy for hot water heaters, and so I've become aware more of solar energy, it's very effective, and coal. We have enough coal I guess to last us two hundred years. A friend of mine owns a coal mine, matter of fact I fish with him on his boat, and he has enough coal himself to last, to produce the way he's producing now for a hundred years. That's what he tells me anyway. So yeah, I think there are a lot of moves being made now, I think gasohol is one of them, and liquefaction of coal into gas... And I wonder how much oil is out there. Don't you?

INT: Who knows?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: How could we find out? ...Was there anything else that you wanted to say about all of this?

NAR: No. *[Laughs.]*

INT: You've covered every possible thing.

NAR: We've covered everything, yes.