

Date: July 12, 1979

Occupation: Office Supervisor

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

NARRATOR: I guess when it broke on the news, the Thursday, I don't know. Whenever it broke on the news is when I heard it.

INT: You heard it on radio or television?

NAR: Radio

INT: Did you know the reactor was there?

NAR: Yes, I did.

INT: Did you know how far away Three Mile Island was?

NAR: Yes, I did.

INT: How far is it?

NAR: From where I live, about thirty miles.

INT: What did you think about at that point or talked about?

NAR: What did I talk about? I talked about the fact that it had been turned on before it was supposed to be turned on, I talked about the problems that had arisen that should have been thought about before it had been happening even before people were aware of it, I did not see China Syndrome till after Three Mile Island, but in China Syndrome, did you see it? In the middle of it there is a statement made it would wipe out Pennsylvania the size of Pennsylvania, and I think it's too bad that the majority of people didn't care enough to find out about what was happening. I was aware of Three Mile Island long before most people were because when I was married, my husband was working on Three Mile Island, and I knew a bit more about it than the average person did because I was very concerned then.

INT: How long ago was that?

NAR: That would have been better than nine years ago, because I've been separated nine years. So, um...let's talk about maybe twelve years ago when it was beyond inception and not totally completed.

INT: Did you feel that it was a crisis at that point, when you first heard about it?

NAR: You mean when they were first building it? Well any time you're playing with the unknown, it's a crisis because most people become panic stricken and when you have panic you have all kinds of wrong things happening much worse than if it had been some kind of planned format for this kind of thing happening.

INT: So you did think it was serious?

NAR: I think any time nuclear power is released, it's serious.

INT: Did you seek out further information then?

NAR: Well, I was being very much aware of what was happening here, through John Luetzelswab and Priscilla Laws. I had more confidence in what they were saying than anything Met Ed was saying that the government was putting out.

INT: What did you think of the government's handling?

NAR: Well, I think the thing was handled so badly because the media made such a mishmash of it that panic became so prevalent. The majority of people were not thinking clearly about what was happening. They really didn't know what was happening, and neither did the government or Met Ed. In the Smithsonian magazine, the one I'm reading now, there is a marvelous mishmash of what was happening by the commission; they didn't know what was happening.

INT: The NRC?

NAR: The NIC and then they were referring to NAS and ES and they were having all kinds of trouble because nobody knew what they should be actually releasing. Have you read that review?

INT: No, do you think I could have a copy?

NAR: I will bring that in for you, that is really a dynamite thing. Telling you what bureaucracy means...zilch. Just it was the funnies thing I've read, "Well what do you think we should release? Well, why don't we release what you said? Well, I don't remember what I said. Well, it doesn't really matter, it wasn't relevant." I'll bring it in, yes that me and you should read it.

INT: What do you think about Met Ed's handling of the situation?

NAR: Well, as I said I think Met Ed and the government handled it very badly.

INT: So all three? The media as well?

NAR: Oh no. Well the media, bless their hearts, were only putting out what they were being fed, which some certain questions, and you know China Syndrome personified this situation so well.

INT: So you were paying more attention than you normally would to the radio and television?

NAR: That kind of news, I certainly was.

INT: Do you remember any particular sources that you were listening to?

NAR: Oh, sources...um...The coverage that was given when Jimmy Carter went in with Roslynn, which was TV. Uh... and I'm not sure, I think that was probably a Harrisburg station, but I'm not really sure because that got national coverage, if you remember. Most of the news that I was getting was from the Harrisburg stations, WHP-FM and what is it, Harrisburg 27, Channel 27 news broadcast.

INT: Was there anyone you found to be particularly reliable or whose word you trusted more than anyone else's?

NAR: Well, as I said in the beginning, I trusted Pricilla Laws and John Luetzelschwab much more than anybody else that was forthcoming with information.

INT: Was there anybody you particularly mistrusted?

NAR: Uh huh. The government and Met Ed.

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

NAR: No.

INT: What made you feel that way?

NAR: Well, the minute they start giving you double-talk, you start to distrust everybody. I feel that if they had brought in and permitted to remain some of the real specialists and really know what they're doing, I realize there's got to be a point for human error. But this was gone beyond human error; this was them being trying to pap feed the general public what they wanted us to know, not what was actually happening. And that does not lead into a great trustworthy friendship.

INT: Do you feel now that they were in control?

NAR: No, I do not feel that it was handled well, I do not feel that they were in control. I think whatever happened was thank God, a comedy of errors and it turned out well. It had a good curtain, shall we say.

INT: So, you felt that way both now and at the time?

NAR: Yes I am not at all satisfied that it was well done.

INT: Do you feel now that they are in control at this moment?

NAR: No, because we now have a Peach Bottom element down around Delta, which tells me that they haven't really learned anything from their previous mistake.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: No, not really worried because I had read enough that was telling me that whatever was happening, um... there was danger and it was critical, but I did not feel that I was in danger, nor that we were around the area in danger. As a matter of fact if the thing had gotten really bad, Carlisle was going to be a relo for 500 firemen, and I had offered my help... a relocation, and I had told Barry when he told me this, that Mr. Galal would be in charge of that situation that anything I could do to help, I would be happy to. What I'm saying is, I was not planning to evacuate.

INT: So, you didn't make any plans out of the ordinary?

NAR: I did not.

INT: Did it affect your job in any way?

NAR: We picked up a bit more paperwork, for some printing, and for the... I'm not sure what they called it, down at the courthouse. Some kind of survival situation that was set up, and we did a lot of their printing for them.

INT: So it was more off campus printing?

NAR: Well we did some seminar work with the students and faculty partially gone. They were working on special seminars; we did a lot of that, but as far as the actual problem arising, I don't see a great deal of extra work involved, no.

INT: You didn't think at all about leaving the area?

NAR: No, I did not.

INT: Is there somebody in your life that you were watching in order to decide if you should leave or whether you should stay here?

NAR: Not really.

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

NAR: Yes, a keystone kops kind of situation. Everybody kind of running around in a very disorderly uh... melee I think would be a good word. One set of orders being rescinded by another set of orders and the people just kind of standing there with their heads wagging back and forth, not really knowing. I don't feel that people were very well-organized through the whole situation.

INT: Do you think anything that may have happened there may have affected your health, either now or in the future?

NAR: I'm in no position to say that. I did not have any qualms about anything happening to me. My immediate reaction is no.

INT: You didn't think of your own death, or that of others? So you felt you would survive this thing?

NAR: Oh, yeah.

INT: What other aspects of your life do you think may have been affected?

NAR: I don't think anything basically was affected by this. I did some mental gymnastics as I said with what was happening and trying to sift out what was true and what wasn't. Again coming back to I think the best knowledge that we got; the best information was fed through the College. I don't have any real reaction to it at all.

INT: Do you think the community was changed in any way?

NAR: I think there was a certain amount of pandemonium, yeah.

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

NAR: Oh, no.

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

NAR: If it had gotten to the point where there would have been a real serious fallout, I... my mental pictures went back to the bombings of Japan during World War II and those kinds of reactions, which would be really not pretty pictures at all. But I did not have that feeling that that's what was actually happening here.

INT: But it did make you think of that?

NAR: I went back to that, yes. That was a very real situation for me. I lost a husband in Europe during that war so that war is a real war. They refer to it as The War but everyone is The War. This was World War II, of course. And when they did turn loose

this A-bomb over in Japan the reaction, if it should have had a big fallout, would have been very much that kind of situation.

INT: So it was a personal situation as well as a historical situation came to mind?

NAR: Yes, oh yes very definitely.

INT: Did you think of God during the incident?

NAR: I think each of us subconsciously always thinks of God. As far as becoming a more religious person, no.

INT: Did you think that He figured strongly in any way in the incident?

NAR: I have a hard time giving an answer to that. I'm going to have to ponder that a few seconds. Um...they say that He has the all-scheme worked out and if in case that is it, um...yes. Uh when I was a little girl, my grandmother used to tell me that water was the one ruination of the world and fire would be the next. Perhaps I got into that a wee bit because I mentioned it now, but certainly not as the all encompassing end of the world kind of thing. I did not see it as a millennium, no.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: Not any more than usual.

INT: You didn't pray about the incident?

NAR: No, I did not give it that much credence.

INT: Did you feel that you had any kind of responsibilities during the incident?

NAR: I felt that if the College or the town was going to be the relo session, that I would certainly have a responsibility to the people here that would need help getting it organized or doing whatever needed done.

INT: Did you feel that that conflicted with any of your other responsibilities?

NAR: It wouldn't have had time; that would have been primary.

INT: Was your job affected in any way?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have anything else that you otherwise would not have had to do; did you have to do anything?

NAR: I don't think so.

INT: How do you think it affected you and those around you in your work situation?

NAR: I think those around me kept a very cool head, um... now by those I mean the immediate surroundings, some faculty and some students, of course, disappeared. I could understand with the information that was being fed that mothers with very small children and women pregnant would want to get out. But I didn't have any of those kinds of feelings. So, I don't feel that my immediate people or the people immediately around me were in any way, concerned yes, but not ready to flee.

INT: Did you see, other than WWII, did you see this incident as similar to anything else in your life?

NAR: Well, if I did it was very subconscious and did not surface because those other things were very primary.

INT: Did you find the incident frightening in that it was more frightening than say a flood or a hurricane or even war?

NAR: No, as a matter of fact I felt that our flooding situations, and the tornadoes, and hurricanes, were much more devastating, and they were much more positive.

INT: You already mentioned the China Syndrome, but did any other TV shows or movies come to mind or books or stores that you had read?

NAR: Nothing except, of course, "The Old War Stories." Um... nothing that I can point into now. The China Syndrome to me was, other than just a movie; it almost should be a documentary.

INT: You saw it after this?

NAR: I did, indeed, see it after this, and I guess I'm glad because it would have certainly made me even less of a believer in Met Ed and the government if I had seen it before, but it certainly did personify my feelings about them.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: They won't let me sing, but I whistle a lot.

INT: Were you whistling anything in particular?

NAR: Nothing particular, I just kinda cut loose.

INT: Did you have any daydreams at the time that you remember?

NAR: Daydreams? Compared to nightmares?

INT: Daydreams and nightmares; sleeping dreams?

NAR: I think nothing that would have been caused or involved in this kind of syndrome, no.

INT: Sleeping dreams, either?

NAR: No.

INT: Did it affect your sleep in any way?

NAR: No.

INT: Have you had any since?

NAR: Not about the actual problems, no. It did not get into my subconscious that much that it surfaced in these kind of things.

INT: Did you notice any changes happening to the people around you during the incident?

NAR: Yes. There were many nervous nellys. Some just took off without exception. They just left. Others stayed around, packed, ready to go if something happened. Preparation was done for these kind of things. Some left and some did not. It was certainly a topic of conversation, of coffee breaks, lunch, dinner, of even just little side clicks going on around. It was much, much conversation about the situation.

INT: What kind of things did you talk about?

NAR: Oh, where you going, how far away was it to be safe, what would happen if rains came, how far down is down until the stuff starts spreading around? Where would you go to be safe if you didn't get out of the area? Those are the kinds of things, the hypothetical, the speculation, nothing positive other than the people that left. That was a positive thing. Others were just kind of hypothetically prepared.

INT: How did you feel about their reaction to it? Did you feel they were overreacting?

NAR: I think there was a great deal of overreacting, but only because they didn't really have all the facts that they needed to have. That the imminent danger was there, there was no question, but that the immediate danger of actually happening, that was a big question.

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



NAR: That would be very difficult because most of the people that disappeared, I did not know well enough to make even a calculated estimation on it. I feel that the people that stayed remained fairly much the same.

INT: So with the people that did leave, did you find it characteristic or uncharacteristic of them?

NAR: Well, again I can't really be in a position to answer that because I didn't know them well enough to know whether that would be what they would do or whether it was just a immediate reaction.

INT: Did you hear other people saying how "Oh, it was strange that he left or she left?"

NAR: I think one of the strangest things in the site of everybody leaving was that John Luetzelschwab, who is Chairman of the Physics Department and lives right across from Three Mile Island, did NOT leave; did not pack his family up and move. I, I... that gave me a great deal of questioning about the people that did go.

INT: Did it give you kind of a steadying effect?

NAR: Well, I think he and Priscilla again gave me a very steadying effect, very kind of calming, reassuring kind of situation.

INT: Do you thin it changed you in any lasting way?

NAR: No, I just kind of go on forever. Nothing too much changes me (laughing).

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

NAR: Oh, yes. The T-shirts, you know. "I survived Three Mile Island, I Think." One of them I wanted to do was a silk screen to send to my grandchildren. "My Grandmother Survived Three Mile Island," but I couldn't get anybody to cut that many letters. Oh, there were many incidents of humor. I don't think all the humor was good. I think some of it was rather sadistic. But I think the one that said, "I Survived Three Mile Island, I Think" had to be one of the better things that came out of it.

INT: Why do you think there was so much joking?

NAR: You always have a certain amount of humor, good or bad, where you have a panic or critical situation. It is a psychological release, I think.

INT: Do you think that the jokes that were passed were meant to be funny and were?

NAR: Oh, yes.

INT: Do you think they were accepted as funny?

NAR: In some instances. As I said, I think some of the stuff that came out, for “humor”, was just a bit more sadistic than a lot of people would accept as funny.

INT: Do you remember any joking from other crisis situations, like World War II and Kennedy assassination, Jonestown, that type of thing?

NAR: Oh sure, yeah. The... I’m having a hard time bringing some of those into scope right now. Uh...there was a very vulgar song came out during World War II dealing with a German lady who carried a radio or transmitter or whatever as she was making love to the GI’s getting all kinds of information which was feeding back. Some of them were clever and gave her all kinds of wrong information, and then there was Tokyo rose who did these kinds of things. But again nothing that I can pinpoint into a reality. Thank God I missed that.

INT: Can you think of any ways where the joking might be similar?

NAR: Well, again I think any kind of humor that comes out of any tragedy is again a psychological relief. It’s like a bad synonym, somebody expelling wind and being embarrassed, and they giggle instead of pardoning me or something. Do you know the reaction I’m talking about?

INT: Okay, yes. Have you developed an opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: Yeah, but nothing that changed with like...in other words, the development was that I think we do need it. I think there is a definite place for it. I think that it is a great thing that we can harness these kinds of things and put them into practical use. I think the problem was that there wasn’t enough foresight done with what would happen with a situation like Three Mile Island or going back now to Peach Bottom. I would, I feel more comfortable that there had been something. Let’s go into something else – Skylab. The one thing that they didn’t think was going to happen, you see, that’s a hundred and fifty million dollars I think that has just degenerated. I think... I think it is marvelous that we can do all these things. I think it is fantastic that we have the brains and the people are given these abilities. I just wish that there was some kind of free work done so that we would have answers before we need them.

INT: Is there anything else that you can think of that you may like to say or that I may have forgotten?

NAR: Well, I think you covered it well. That’s a good questionnaire. I’m sorry I wasn’t a better kind of person to interview, but I really didn’t have any great feelings of terror. And when I say any great feelings, I don’t think I had any. I didn’t feel the need for mass panic. I would like to see a bit more precaution worked into what is doing now, but I do not feel that we should stop having nuclear work done. I think it’s a very necessary part of our economy.

