

Date: October 29, 1979

Occupation: housewife now but has worked in social work

INTERVIEWER: When did you first hear about the TMI incident? Do you remember, that week span in there – the day?

NARRATOR: Well when's the first day?

INT: I guess it came out on Wednesday.

NAR: Well, Wednesday. About noon.

INT: Do you remember from whom?

NAR: Yeah, Barb Landis.

INT: *[laughs]* Oh, okay.

NAR: She called me on the phone.

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

NAR: Yeah.

INT: How far away is it from us?

NAR: It's about – almost thirty miles I'd say. What would you think?

INT: I'm not sure where we are in proportion. I'm not positive, from exactly Carlisle either. What did you think or talk about at this point, what did you and – say, Mrs. Landis talk about?

NAR: How soon we were going to get away.

INT: Oh. *[Both laugh.]* Did you feel it was a serious situation?

NAR: Well, yeah. I did. *She* felt it was, you know – but, yes I did, as soon as I knew what was going on.

INT: Did you think it was a crisis?

NAR: At the very first?

INT: Yeah, right at the beginning.

NAR: No.

INT: Did your attitude change? Did you begin to feel it was more serious or even a crisis?

NAR: Yeah, sure. As I turned on the radio and kept hearing more reports.

INT: Did you seek out further information those first few days?

NAR: I did just from talking to other people and listening to the radio and watching TV.

INT: Do you remember the sources, do you remember like what station or channel you were listening to?

NAR: No. I don't know the radio stations around here at all. I know I just turned on the radio and then I probably listened to all the TV stations. Twenty-one and twenty-seven, and eight, those were the three we had.

INT: How did you feel about others' reaction to the incident?

NAR: Others?

INT: Mm-hmm.

NAR: Well at first I thought my friends were a little overreacting. Like right at the very beginning, but then as I, you know, after I turned on the radio and started listening [*unintelligible*]. The first time I heard there might be a meltdown [*both laugh*], that's when I realized it was a real crisis at that point.

INT: So you followed newspapers, or, did you follow newspapers, along with the radio and TV?

NAR: Yeah. Also my parents from Erie – it seemed like they were getting more information than we were at the beginning and they called up right away that night and said they were coming to get me. Let's see, that wasn't Wednesday though, I didn't leave here until Saturday. They must have called on Thursday and said they were coming on Friday, to take me up there and at that point my husband was getting ready to go away, he goes away on his job a lot. So I said I couldn't leave until Saturday so that's when I left.

INT: Did they pick you up?

NAR: Yeah, my husband drove me to State College and they drove down and we met. Saturday morning.

INT: I see. What did you take with you when you left?

NAR: Just - my son. *[Both laugh.]* And our clothes that's all; you know, just enough clothes. I didn't take all of my valuables. I thought I'd be coming back.

INT: Were you pregnant at the time?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Oh, I see. *[Pause.]* You said you had two there – oh, you didn't take the other one? *[Laughs.]*

NAR *[laughing]*: I took that one too, I had no choice. That's one of the reasons I left.

INT: Did you pay more attention to the newspapers, radio, and TV? More than usual? More than you would have?

NAR: Oh, definitely. Well not – well, newspapers I always pay attention to, but listening to the radio and all the news that I could, I don't usually do that, you know.

INT: How did you feel about the media's handling of the situation?

NAR: I thought that they were really keeping a lot from us, especially around here. Because when I was in Erie I'd listen to the news and call up my husband who was still here, and I'd tell *him* what was going on. I was getting much more than what he was getting, and he was listening to the news around here.

INT: How did you feel about the government officials' handling of the incident? Well, this is at the time before...

NAR: This is before – the Wednesday, Thursday?

INT: When you were going through it, how did you feel? Did you have any opinion at all?

NAR: I'm trying to think.

INT: Yeah, it's kind of hard.

NAR: It's hard because right now how I feel about it. I still feel that we weren't getting the truth; I remember that, simply from the conflicting reports that my husband and I were getting. You know, I'd call him up and he'd say, gee, I didn't hear about that... you know, I just, I really felt . . . You'd listen to one thing and you'd hear one thing and then you'd hear something else from somebody. I trusted the government officials more than I trusted Met Ed. I know that.

INT: How did you feel about Met Ed?

NAR: I didn't believe a word they said. I just – I've always had a distrust of big business and especially oil. Just anyone connected with that. I really didn't feel that you would be able to believe what they said because they were definitely going to say anything – you know, to minimize it.

INT: So, was there anyone who you found particularly reliable at the time? Someone whose word you trusted more than others? As a source of information?

NAR: I don't think so. I was just really confused.

INT: Yeah. It's hard to know. Was there anyone you mistrusted?

NAR: No, just Met Ed officials. I can't even remember names.

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

NAR: At the time? I guess... I think I did. I think I did more than people I talked to. I just sort of trusted them and then as time went on I just... you know, the more I heard and things, I just kept – I didn't trust anyone anymore.

INT: Right now, do you feel that those in charge were in control, looking back on it?

NAR: No. Definitely not.

INT: Do you feel that they're in control now?

NAR: Of the Three Mile Island?

INT: Mmm-hmm.

NAR: No. I don't think the government officials have anything right now to do with it and I don't think that people...

INT: Just the people that are running the whole thing. I guess Met Ed now.

NAR: No, I don't think they know what to do. I really don't.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: Oh, definitely.

INT: What worried you the most?

NAR: The effect that any radiation would have on my son and on unborn child. I didn't really worry about it for me. And then I really worried, when I was in Erie and was getting all that information of what was going to –you know, my husband being back

here. I wanted him to be up there. But he left. He went out of town for his job, so he wasn't really around either.

INT: Did you make any plans different from what you ordinarily would've, at the time?

NAR: Yeah, I left. *[INT laughs.]* I had been planning on going out of town anyway when my husband left, but I was going to go on Monday and I had plane tickets to fly out of Harrisburg airport. And I wasn't going anywhere near Harrisburg airport at that point *[laughing]*. When I made the arrangements with my dad to drive up to Erie, and then I stayed up there until I felt that it was safe to come back.

INT: What did you think about leaving the area?

NAR: I was just glad to get away. You know, to get out.

INT: So you felt you'd come back?

NAR: Oh yeah, I thought I would come back. I guess I never thought it was going to be the worst that it could've. When I heard a chance of a meltdown I was scared, but I never thought that was going to happen. I just – I guess I thought that people were more in control more than they really were. And I didn't – when I see how close they were to a meltdown now, at that – I don't think I ever, because I didn't know the workings of a nuclear power plant, at that point I never really thought...

INT: What finally brought you to leave? What made that decision for you or how did you come to that?

NAR: Just everybody told me to leave, and I just started to get – I was more scared, as I kept talking to other people and they were leaving. I'd call one friend and she'd say "I got my bags packed, I'm going", and I called another friend and she said – you know, that she had already left, I decided that – I should get out. And my husband wanted me to go and then my parents called... So I was scared. It's my life.

INT: How long did you stay away? You said you left on Saturday.

NAR: I stayed away a week. I think. *[Pause.]* Yeah, it was at least a week. It might have even been like ten days. I think it was, I think it was... I left on a Saturday and I came back on a Monday.

INT: Was there anything that you... ah, I asked this before, wanted to take with you? Did you think about that?

NAR: No, I – well, I just always felt that I was coming back, so I didn't take anything. All I took was the things that I was going to need while I was up there.

INT: Was there someone in your life that you were watching in order to decide whether to leave or not? Say, the guy down the street leaves, I'm leaving or if he stays, I'm staying, or...?

NAR: No. I was just... I just looked to my friends and to my husband for their reactions and when everyone left and they thought I should go, I went.

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

NAR: No. I don't think I did – at that point.

INT: Do you think anything that happened at TMI might have affected your health – say, now?

NAR: I don't know. I still worry about it.

INT: How about in the future? Like – something that did happen there, affected – affect your health?

NAR: Well that's what I'm worried about. I don't think anything's affected me yet, or affected my kids. But that's – you know, I don't know. I don't believe people when they say it won't have any effect. I still think that it might.

INT: What do you think the effects will be? Could be?

NAR: I don't know, I mean, if my son when he turns 12 comes down with leukemia I'll look back at this time and think it might be. I realize that it might not have any effect whatsoever. The same with my daughter. I don't know really what effect it could have, but – if something happened, if something does happen I'll always look back and wonder if that had any effect.

INT: Has any other aspects of your life been affected by this?

NAR: *[Pause.]* Any *other* aspects? No, it just made me more anti-nuclear.

INT: How about in your community? Do you think Carlisle or this area is affected?

NAR: This area, it's real hard to say. This is a pretty conservative little area around here. I don't know. I've never talked to people around here about it. I think Carlisle just from, you know, things I've read in the paper and people I've talked to, they've all... but you know, I haven't seen any big effects.

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

NAR: If the *worst* had occurred?

INT: What was your picture of the worst?

NAR: *[laughing]* Well, I had just seen *The China Syndrome* two days – that weekend before Three Mile Island, so – just what they describe in there as far as “an area the size of Pennsylvania that’s now uninhabitable”...

INT: *[laughing]* Oh, geez! Did they say that?

NAR: Yeah, that’s a fact, it was right out of the movie! You know, right out of *the movie*. And they say that that was taken directly from the Nuclear Regulatory... something-or-other, that they, that had been published, so – you know, I could just see a whole area completely without any life.

INT: How do you think it would have affected your health?

NAR: If the worst had happened?

INT: Yeah.

NAR: Gee, I don’t even like to think about it. *[Pause.]* I don’t know. Immediately, I don’t know. I know all the – what they say the affects of acute radiation poisoning is; the same thing that happened at Hiroshima.

INT: How about other aspects of your life?

NAR: If the worst had happened I would not have been able to come back, which means that all my – everything that we own we would have not been able to have, so that would definitely affect my life and all I would have had would be... Probably my husband, I probably wouldn’t have seen my husband again, although – no, he was out of town, so it’s *[unintelligible]*. No, but it definitely had a – it would have completely changed my life. That’s for sure.

INT: At the time did you have any concerns about the food or milk from this area?

NAR: Yes, definitely. I still do. As far as milk, especially because I’m breastfeeding, and I think about it all the time. I go to the stores where I think that they have milk that comes from far away.

INT: From outside this area.

NAR: From outside, yeah. Although it’s hard to tell because a lot of the – I guess I could ask the manager, but a lot the stores don’t really say. They say “Processed at Plant... AJ108”, or something like that, and you don’t know where that is. *[INT laughs]* I don’t buy milk from Lancaster Dairies. That’s where Giant gets all their milk. I don’t know, that’s probably – that could be trucked there from far away, too, but just...

INT: Yeah. You don't know how that works. Did you picture in your mind any effects of radiation on life around you? Was that part of your thinking at the time?

NAR: It's hard to say *at the time* because at the time, I don't think I was... I'm sure I must have had thoughts in my mind, you know, of people's skin falling off, I mean, that's what you – that's what hear. Hair falling out... I don't know if I had those thoughts right at the time. I know I've had them a lot since. I've been more afraid and more scared of what could have happened afterwards than the immediate three or four days of all this happening.

INT: Did you think of your own death at the time?

NAR: No.

INT: That of others?

NAR: No, I don't think I did. I was worried about what effect it would have on my kids, but I didn't think that it would cause their death.

INT: Did you think you would survive?

NAR: Yes.

INT: What reassured you about this?

NAR: I don't think I was reassured about it. I just don't think that I ever... I just never really realized the severity of it at the time.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: About what?

INT: God?

NAR: I don't know...I don't think I did. You know, any more than I think about him... or about her...normally, which I do, but I don't think – I don't remember falling on my knees and praying or anything like that.

INT: Did you pray about this at all?

NAR: No. I don't think so.

INT: How did God figure in all of this? Did he play a part for you?

NAR: No. I don't turn to God at times when I think that man has really screwed up. I don't think that He... My feelings about religion are that he put us, or someone put us on

this earth to do what we want to do. And if we want to build nuclear power plants and, you know, affect the world that way, that he's just going to – or she's just going to – sit there and laugh at us. I would never pray for – for someone to come in and stop something that man has done stupidly. If that makes sense.

INT: Did you feel that you had certain responsibilities during the incident? Toward your family or job?

NAR: Yeah, just to get my kids away. I don't have – you know, I don't work outside the house so I didn't have responsibility there. My husband felt he had a responsibility to stay here, and I disagreed with that. It probably would have been a conflict because if he hadn't already had plans to go out of town, because I would have wanted him to come with us and he probably would have felt that he had to stay here for his job.

INT: So that was kind of resolved for you, huh?

NAR: Yeah. We didn't have to worry about that.

INT: Was his job or work affected by TMI?

NAR: Oh, what did he tell me, he said... No, I don't think it was. He works for a private consulting firm, and most of the people stayed. *[Unintelligible]*, he said.

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

NAR: Because of TMI? ...No. Just to leave. Or I had to hurry up and leave, as I told you I was planning on leaving earlier, I mean on Monday and I had to hurry up and get everything ready.

INT: Did you have ideas of how it would be best to behave in such a situation? Say ethical or moral or...religious ideas?

NAR: No. I don't think I thought about it. I would just act the same as I'd always act.

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

NAR: Yeah, the movie I'd seen three days prior to it.

INT: Did anything like this happen to you before?

NAR: No.

INT: How about in history?

NAR: Did anything like this happen in history?

INT: Mm-hmm, that you kind of – connected. Whether this evacuation, you know, your leaving, and – feeling danger from an unknown source?

NAR: Not that I've ever experienced.

INT: You mentioned Hiroshima, did that thought...?

NAR: Yeah, that thought because that's the only association I have with radiation. I had seen a movie once, when I was in college, and I don't even know what movie it was, but it was the effects of... And, and those pictures were flashing through my mind at different times. That's what I said about the skin falling off and people being blinded and... So that's the only, you know, that's... But I don't think I thought those thoughts right at the time because I never thought it would be that bad.

INT: Was this situation more or less frightening than say a war or a hurricane or a flood?

NAR: Definitely less frightening than a war at that time. A war here, right, but not the Viet- you know, not a war that I don't really associate myself with unless, you know, some part of my family had something to do with it. If that makes sense. A flood or hurricane, I never experienced those. At the time a flood or hurricane would probably be... more scary, at the immediate time. But when I think back on it overall, I think that TMI is definitely more.

INT: What about it would frighten you more?

NAR: What frightens me most is that radiation is so . . . you can't see it. It's just – and so you never know if it's there. Like a flood... If a flood washed my family away it would definitely be terrible; it would-be right there [INT laughing]. But still, if I experienced a flood and we all survived a flood and it was over, it would be, I would know that it was over. But with radiation you never know. Same with a hurricane. It would be scary while it was here but as soon as it's over, it's over.

INT: You said *China Syndrome* came to mind, did any other TV shows or movies come to mind?

NAR: No.

INT: How about any books or stories?

NAR: I don't think so.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: No, not that I can remember.

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

NAR: Daydreams? ...I don't think so.

INT: Have you had any since?

NAR: Oh, every once in a while I might think about... I might get flashes in my mind, you know, of what a meltdown would have looked.... You know, a huge cloud rising over Pennsylvania, but I just... I think about it a lot. I guess...

[END OF SIDE A]

NAR: When I was pregnant, I thought about whether my child would be born healthy or not. But I did that with my first son too, I mean, I think that's normal for a pregnant woman to do. But I guess I, I might have done it a little more because I wondered what effect TMI would have on her. That's all I can remember as far-as daydreams.

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

NAR: I don't think so. Not that I can remember.

INT: Have you had any since?

NAR: I think... I remember telling my friends that I had a dream about the baby. And I remember them saying to me, "it's probably because of TMI", but I can't remember what the dream was. It had to do probably with the baby being deformed or something about the baby. I can remember them saying to me, I bet that's because of TMI, but now I can't think of what it was.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed in any way at that time?

NAR: I probably didn't sleep as well. That was in part because I was away from my husband too and I never sleep as well when I'm away from him, and I was sleeping with my son and I *never* sleep when I sleep with him! *[Both laugh.]* I'm sure that I thought about it a lot. I remember when I was in Erie and I had heard that the bubble was there and it could lead to a meltdown and all this, I remember just really worrying about what was gonna happen and knowing that my husband wasn't going to go out of town until like Monday, and just hoping that nothing happened at least until he got out. I mean I hoped that nothing happened ever, that's for sure, but can I remember just – following it really closely, and really being afraid to hear the news.

INT: *[unintelligible comment]*

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Were there any changes to the people around you during the incident?

NAR: Well, I was around my parents. I think they were both affected by it. Because I'm sure my mother *no* knowledge of nuclear power before then. You know, I'm sure she

just never thought about it – and it made her think about it a lot more. I can remember her and my Dad having discussions about it – or all three of us having discussions about it, and I'm sure that's the first she ever, like I just said, the first she ever thought about nuclear power. She was saying that, "if they're as dangerous as this that it shouldn't be around", you know, and I'm sure she never thought like that. My Dad works for GE, he was saying, "Well we need nuclear power." But I still think *his* thinking was changed a little bit too, especially I think when he realized that his daughter and his grandchildren were affected by it.

INT: It's home now.

NAR: Because even though he was saying we still need nuclear power, he was the first to call me up and say "I'm comin' to get you."

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

NAR: I bet – It must have changed everybody that was connected with it at all, you know. At least even just – making them just a little bit... leery of what was going on. And making people even people who, like my Dad, who still believe in nuclear power, that there have to be more safeguards. You know, my Dad was saying, "we still need nuclear power but they should get their act together before they do anything else". And people who were against it in the first place, it just really reinforced it.

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

NAR: Mmmm... It must have, but I don't know how. *[Pause.]* It's hard. It made me even more anti-nuclear, and also reinforced my desire to get away from cities and move far away – even though I realize, you'd have to move pretty far away in order to get out of the effect of radiation if anything happened. It reinforced my dislike of big monopolies, like I associate Med Ed with. Because I don't, I feel that money is really powerful and that whenever anybody's making a lot of money, they are going to do anything they can to cover up. I just think it reinforced a lot of feelings that I had even before now, that's all. I think, I don't know.

INT: Did you write letters to congressmen, along with some of the other women in this group?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Do you feel that that kind of action has any effect? This is kind of off the record, but one of the women said that she does not feel lost in the system.

NAR: She does not feel lost?

INT: Mm-hm, in the system.

NAR: I feel lost. I don't think it had any effect. I think it was... The replies I got from them were the replies that *anybody*, pro or against would have sent. If I would have wrote that "it doesn't matter what would have happened at TMI, I think we should build all the nuclear power plants", I think they would have sent us that same letter, because it didn't say whether they were for or against or anything...

INT: So ambiguous that it was...

NAR: Yes, definitely. You know, I'm sure that probably a secretary might have opened the letter and made maybe a little check mark for or against, so maybe he can see, but I still think that nuclear power plants and the lobby behind them have so much influence and so much money behind them that... I'm really glad to see all the anti-nuclear protesting. I don't know how many people there are. It really surprised me. We went down to Washington, and I was really surprised at the number of people that were down there. You know, and I still – Even though I do things like that because I hope they have an effect on them, I don't know whether they do or not.

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

NAR: Yeah, I did, but I don't know what they are. I remember my husband, when he went out of town, he went to New Mexico, I think Albuquerque is where he went. And he and a couple of other guys from his office, when he came back he told me that they had just gotten all kinds of jokes the whole week they were down there at some convention. I think it was an *[unintelligible]* – See, he works in coal mining. And so a lot of the people that were down there were energy people. But they were just the butt of jokes all week. So when he came back he told me, you know – things like *[laughs]*, going back to Harrisburg, and there's not gonna be a Harrisburg. You know, all kind of... I don't know.

INT: Did you hear any new words or funny remarks that you had never heard before?

NAR: *[Pause.]* I'm trying to think. I'm sure I did but I can't remember. Just some of the, like things you read on T-shirts and bumper stickers and stuff like that. I thought a lot of them were really funny but I don't remember any of them right now.

INT: Did you see any posters or graffiti?

NAR: Oh yeah, a lot of them. Especially when we were down in Washington and all that. You know, you see all kinds of...

INT: Yeah. Why do you think there was joking going on at this time? Do you think there was a reason behind it, or...?

NAR: I'm sure it's a release, or... When you really worry about things, you have to laugh. Just for the relief. I think that's what it was, and then... I think that's mainly what it was.

INT: What joking do you remember from other crises, say, the Kennedy assassination, or invasion of Cambodia, or Johnstown or Guyana?

NAR: Hmm. I don't think I do. No, definitely not... I don't really remember, no, I don't remember any joking from the Kennedy assassination, or from Cambodia, or really Guyana when it was happening. But I wasn't really affected. You know, it wasn't really affecting the people that I was talking to at the time. Even though they all had, especially like maybe the assassination of Kennedy had an effect on people's lives, then I was associated with other people. But still, it wasn't like it was even happening to them. I think that most of the joking and stuff that was going on was just because people were so worried and so tense that they had to have a little bit of relief.

INT: This was actually hitting them and not some other...

NAR: Right.

INT: Have you developed an opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: Since Three Mile Island? I definitely have an opinion and it's a very negative one, if I haven't already said that about a million times *[laughs]*. And Three Mile Island just reinforced that. It hasn't made me change my opinion or I'd give it. I just feel that it's just – First of all it's just so dangerous that it shouldn't be here. There's no place to put the waste, you know, plus the cost of it is so prohibitive. It doesn't make any sense. If they would put all the money they are putting into nuclear energy into solar, which wouldn't have any harmful effects, then I think they could develop that.

INT: How would you feel if they put a nuclear power plant in your backyard?

NAR: Right here? I'd move. Definitely.

INT: Is there anything else you want to say about all of this?

NAR: If I lived in Middletown I probably would have moved. I feel that we're not real far away, but thirty miles is a lot better, at the point of the crisis, than ten miles was. I remember like the day it happened my son was out playing in the sandbox, and I called up my husband at work and said, should I bring him in, and he just laughed because they had been saying for people to come indoors and shut your windows and stuff. That was just so silly because you know if there is radiation, I don't feel it is going to be kept out by windows. But he said he can be out in the sandbox, you know, leave him in the sandbox because you're thirty miles away. And at that point, we're also north, oh well I don't know what direction we are, but they were saying that it was going down toward Lancaster, and we're off the other way. But just being – you know, we might even be further than thirty miles away, so I felt that – I don't know... I felt safer than if I would have been in Harrisburg or Middletown, although when you look at the big picture if it would have been a meltdown, it wouldn't have made any difference whether you were

right there or right here, or really whether I would have been in Erie. *[Both laugh.]* If it would have happened.

INT: *[laughing]* Still in Pennsylvania.