

September 25, 1979

Occupation: Obstetrician Gynecologist

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

NARRATOR: I think I heard about it that day on the news at noon as I was going home for lunch. As I recall I heard one of the news conferences.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you realize how far away it was?

NAR: Approximately.

INT: What did you think when you first heard that?

NAR: I don't recall having any particular striking thought.

INT: You didn't view it as a serious situation or crisis?

NAR: Potentially serious, but we have potentially serious incidents every day.

TR Did you then seek out further information?

NAR: I didn't make any special effort I don't think. I tried to listen to all the news reports and specifically listening to the people who I thought would probably have the best information, i.e. the people from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, trying to use that for my source of information to relay on to patients.

INT: Did you talk about it much with your family and friends and co-workers?

NAR: Naturally, it was the major topic of conversation during those days just because it was in the news.

INT: From all these conversations, did your attitude change at all?

NAR: You mean in terms of toward nuclear energy specifically or...?

INT: No, towards what was happening?

NAR: Life in general?

INT: I think towards the event itself at least starting from your conversations?

NAR: Not that I... I see what you mean. Not really, no, I base my feelings and reactions pretty well on what I heard rather than what I was talking to other people about.

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

NAR: I thought there was very close to mass hysteria.

INT: You followed the newspapers and the radio and TV. Do you remember any particular source. You mentioned the Nuclear Regulatory Commission?

NAR: Right, I was extremely upset with the handling by the media. Stories were just completely blown out of proportion. I think we had a distinct advantage here that we

could listen directly to Mr. Denton and hear exactly what was being said at the news conferences where people in other areas and other parts of the country, you know, they had to depend on the news media and the news media just picked up any little thing or any little statement and I was extremely disappointed by the media.

INT: What about the government. You mentioned Mr. Denton. How do you feel they handled things?

NAR: I thought Mr. Denton was the calm in the midst of the storm at the time and I still do. I thought he handled himself very well in the way the things have turned out since that time. You know again I think their information was not always exactly 100% correct but he tried to be honest with people as much as he could.

INT: How did you feel about the industry Metropolitan Edison and the way they handled things?

NAR: Well, I was a former Met Ed customer and I think again as it has turned out, I think that they probably were... not as honest as they could have been with the public, but I don't see that as a big problem at all. It's not something I really fault them for because any other company does exactly the same thing.

INT: Other than Harold Denton was there someone that you found especially reliable or whose word you trusted?

NAR: Well, I think out of the Governor's office, Bill Scranton I think did a good job of trying to stay on top of things even in the early days before Denton really got here. Because it was the weekend as I recall pretty well before he got here and really got involved in things. And up until that time I was depending pretty well on what was coming out of Mr. Scranton's office, since he was the liaison between the Governor and everything else that was going on.

INT: You said that the media disappointed you. Did you really mistrust them at that point?

NAR: I guess I sort of mistrusted the media for a long time.

INT: Not just this incident?

NAR: Not just this incident. The media tends to . . . I don't know if I'd say they manage the news, but they are very selective I think in their news coverage.

INT: Did you feel that the people who were in charge there at TMI were in control of the situation?

NAR: I really had no way of knowing. They didn't appear to be at some times but, you know, I have a basic confidence I think in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission seeing to it and felt that they probably would have seen to it that there were safeguards set up and that the men who are the technicians, the men who were actually involved that morning when it occurred, were probably as in control as they could be under the circumstances considering what they were dealing with.

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

NAR: I think so. They know what's going on in the situation and . . .

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: I don't really think I would say I was worried at any point. No more so than worrying about Hurricane David that just went through. That's all.

INT: Did you make any plans that were different from the ones that you ordinarily would have?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you change any of your ordinary routines?

NAR: No.

INT: Was there a time when you thought about leaving the area?

NAR: No.

INT: So you did not leave at all?

NAR: No.

INT: What brought you to stay?

NAR: I didn't see any point in leaving. I thought there was more risk to leaving, and in fact I think that's been borne out, there were more people probably killed in automobile accidents fleeing the area than would ever have been injured.

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

NAR: No.

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

NAR: I guess so, we all think in pictures, I think, but you know as far as any mental pictures of a melt-down or an explosion of any kind... not really.

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

NAR: No.

INT: In the future?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: Yeah, the practice was affected, because that weekend was just unbelievable in terms of the way patients were calling. And it... well, it really got to the point where we finally turned on the recorder and said that if you were calling about TMI and whether you should leave the area, absolutely not. Our opinion is that you should not leave if you are living in the Carlisle area. Because the phone calls got to the point where we couldn't handle the routine office business.

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

NAR: The worst that probably could have happened was a meltdown. There would have been some radiation exposure in the immediate area, but again I think the immediate area

was evacuated as far as spreading radiation over any broad area. I don't see how that could have occurred.

INT: Were you ever concerned about the food or milk in the area?

NAR: Not really. Again because of the levels that they were indicating that were being released were quite low.

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

NAR: In general, sure, I deal with this all the time. As an obstetrician. And this of course was what most of the questions that people came to us... and we know that radiation does produce effects on human beings and on life forms in general but we're exposed to radiation every day, most of which we have absolutely no control over. So that we aren't as aware of the possibilities.

INT: Did you ever think about your own death?

NAR: No more so than I do any other time.

INT: And what about that of others?

NAR: In terms of family? Friends? In the immediate area again, no, but... I suppose I wondered about the men who were right there involved in the situation and was assuming and hoping that they were adequately protected.

INT: What do you suppose gave you the reassurance that you would survive?

NAR: Well, I guess it goes back to my basic philosophy of life and some people would probably view it as a fatalistic attitude which I don't at all. I live under the premise that God is in control of my life as well as the affairs of the world and there is a verse in Romans that says that all things work together for good for those who love the Lord. If that means my death, okay, I'm willing to accept that, realizing that God is in control.

INT: Did you think a lot about God during this incident?

NAR: I don't think really not much more than at other times. One way that I did think of was being thankful that I had that, my trust in God, to see us through any kind of panic or anything that happened.

INT: Did you find yourself praying at that time?

NAR: Sure, I always do.

INT: Not any more so?

NAR: No, I don't think so.

INT: You talked about your responsibilities as an obstetrician. Were there others that conflicted? With your family, or any other things that you feel you might be responsible for within the community?

NAR: You mean that conflicted with my responsibilities with the practice as an obstetrician? I don't think so, not really. Because again, as I say, I saw no reason to leave myself, I saw no reason to see my family leave... and so I don't think there were any real conflicts there.

INT: Your family or your wife never felt anxious to leave the area?

NAR: I don't think so, she didn't express any concern.

INT: Did you have things to do which you otherwise would not have had to do? Other than making tape recordings and answering a lot of phone calls?

NAR: I think that that was probably the main thing, was the reassuring-- trying to reassure patients.

INT: Did patients actually come in to be seen or was it mostly all over the phone?

NAR: No, we had patients who called in and insisted they absolutely had to be seen because they were leaving the area and wanted to be seen before they left. We couldn't stop them from coming in. If they called in first, we'd say look don't get so uptight because at this point there is really no reason to and you are taking a bigger risk by leaving than by staying. And... But we couldn't talk some of the patients out of it. So yeah, we did have patients coming into the office.

INT: What about anyone who might have been in labor or close to labor at that point?

NAR: We had patients actually, and this, well, it surprised me a little bit, but not too much, I guess. We delivered at least one patient from Harrisburg Hospital, I think it was Harrisburg... one of the hospitals... whose doctor had left and he told her to go somewhere else to be delivered. I couldn't understand that, but that was his choice so yeah, we did have as I recall at least one patient that we did deliver under this circumstance. Never having seen her before.

INT: Was she pretty unnerved, I guess?

NAR: When she first arrived, Ivan... Yeah, she came here in the middle of the night when Ivan was on call and then I ended up delivering her, I think. And I guess when she first got here she was a little upset but she had a thoroughly enjoyable experience I think from what we heard from her and she was very grateful for what we were able to do for her and I'm glad we could help her out. Her husband was with her too and it was a very nice Lamaze delivery.

INT: Did you have any ideas at the time about how it would be best to behave in this kind of a situation?

NAR: Yeah, the best thing to do was try to stay as calm as possible and keep other people from panicking.

INT: So you did behave this way, without any difficulty?

NAR: No, I didn't have any difficulty.

INT: When it happened, was there anything in the way of past experiences or past events that came to mind?

NAR: I don't recall any in particular... I don't think so.

INT: Nothing like that had ever happened to you before, or in history?

NAR: Well, not... I knew that there had been nuclear "accidents" involved with power plants and that there had been exposures and even... well, the deaths that occurred in the

construction of the power plants were... not really related to the radiation at all, they were other types of accidents that occur in any kind of construction. Sure you think of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. But I, you know, I knew the whole time that that could not occur here, because it's a completely totally different type of set-up. The nuclear fuel is... you're not going to have a nuclear explosion with this kind of an accident, and so you know, I... yeah, you think about them from other people talking about it and convinced that it's going to happen, but other than that no.

INT: Did you think that this incident was more or less frightening than say a war, or a hurricane, or a flood?

NAR: Oh I think probably less. To me it was. Maybe because I wasn't as closely involved. You know if I have been right there living 2 miles from Three Mile Island, I'd... sure, I probably would have had a different perspective. But living here in Carlisle, 25 miles away, I really... I suspect a hurricane and floods would have been much more frightening than what occurred her.

INT: Are there any movies or TV shows that come into your mind?

NAR: That I had seen in the past? Everyone was talking about the China Syndrome. I haven't seen it and probably won't, but none that I had seen.

INT: What about any stories or books that you might have read?

NAR: None particularly that I recall.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs?

NAR: No more so than usual.

INT: Are you a singer?

NAR: I do some singing now and then.

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

NAR: No, not that I can recall.

INT: What about any nighttime, sleeping dreams?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Because once, I guess, you got the recording going and that eliminated some of the calls...

NAR: Pretty well so. Most people didn't call at night. They called during the day.

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

NAR: Well, most of the people that I was close to... family and the people in the practice and so on... well, there was a little bit more tension I guess and uncertainty. People in the community... we saw a lot of uncertainty, tension, and outright fear I think.

INT: Do you feel that it changed anyone in a lasting way?

NAR: I suspect that there are people, yeah, whom it affected that way, none of my acquaintances though really.

INT: Not yourself.

NAR: Not myself at all.

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

NAR: Oh yeah, the beautiful one was Wade Seaford's joke. Wade's a prof. of Anthropology at Dickinson. He wrote a letter to the President of the Hershey Foods Corporation and told them that he thought that they ought to make a chocolate candy bar in the form of a mushroom cloud... I'm trying to remember what he called it...

INT: What crawled into his head...?

NAR: I don't remember... I don't remember what... He had a name, a very appropriate name picked out for it. But it was so much like Wade, you know, that... that was the only one that I remember.

INT: Did you see any of the posters on TV or T-shirts...?

NAR: Yeah, there were... I saw that on TV of course. The media again got a lot of coverage out of that. "I survived TMI," "I'm from Harrisburg" and that sort of thing.

INT: It was meant to be funny, did you laugh?

NAR: Yeah, I guess. I don't remember.

INT: Do you remember passing on the information to anyone else about some of these jokes or funny things?

NAR: I probably did, I don't recall specifically relating it to family or acquaintances.

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

NAR: I think joking is one way that people have when they're tense and uptight... it's one way they have of relieving their tension. It's also a way of putting on a front. Trying to give the impression that you're not really as uptight and tense as you are and you don't want to admit to yourself.

INT: Can you remember any joking from other crises?

NAR: Hmm...

INT: Let me give some examples... like the Kennedy assassination, or Guiana, Jonestown?

NAR: Right off hand, at the time of Jonestown, there were a few that I heard... which I didn't think were in very good taste. I don't even remember what they were. Some of the other things I can remember, we were in Baltimore when Hurricane Agnes went through there and there was a lot of flooding and a lot of property damage and so on and then there was some joking but again I don't recall specific anecdotes.

INT: Do you feel that you have developed an opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: Well, I think I had one before. I don't think it has changed any. Nuclear energy, basically, I think it is necessary. I think we're going to have to use it. We don't have

much choice unless we are going to completely and radically change our lifestyle in America, which I don't think, knowing Americans, I don't think we are going to do that. I think nuclear energy can be safe. If there was anything to change with this... it gave me two impressions. I think number one is that indeed there are safeguards, there are buildings and safety systems. But number two, they do fail sometimes and then maybe we need to build in a few more. But as far as the use of nuclear energy, I think it is totally, completely unrealistic at this point in time to say that nuclear energy cannot be used or should not be used for energy in America. Thousands or more people have been killed mining coal, in explosions of gasoline tank trucks, and automobile accidents. I think what happened in Gettysburg, what was it a couple of weeks before that, when the truck loaded with phosphorus caught fire was potentially just as dangerous a situation in terms of loss of life. But yet, these things happen everyday, and there are trains going through Carlisle that if there were an accident, or if somebody wanted to plant a couple of sticks of dynamite under one tank car, they could wipe out half of Carlisle. People don't realize this.

INT: Because the media doesn't give it attention?

NAR: Because the media doesn't give it the attention. That's right. And it's just a couple of weeks later, a train derailed in Florida and they had to evacuate you know, how many thousands of people because of the train wreck. That was on the front page, I think one day, it hit the media, you know, they mentioned it maybe two or three days and then that's it. So you know, I really see nuclear energy as, yes, a very viable alternative.

INT: Just briefly, earlier you mentioned that your faith was the one thing that probably kept you as optimistic as you were throughout this. Did you ever have any Biblical stories of events come to mind other than the quote you gave me from Romans about how God will take care of you?

NAR: Well, I don't recall any specifically thinking about a number of these stories, but there are many instances where God has taken care of his people, you know, in the face of insurmountable odds so to speak. Daniel and the lion's den obviously is one of the stories that comes to mind. The three friends of Daniel's that were thrown into the blazing furnace lived to tell about it. Those are all episodes where... that it strengthens my belief that God wants to see us through even nuclear war, He can. He's got the capability and He's got the power and the strength. At the same time, if He sees fit to allow... the United States or whatever to be wiped out by nuclear war, so be it. I know where I'm going after that, and have that confidence.

INT: So the idea of Satan and the last judgment and the end of the world, did any of those things enter your thinking at some point?

NAR: Again, I don't think any more so than they do at any other time. I believe very much in all of those and I believe, yes, there is going to be a last judgment, but I have the confidence that when that judgment comes, I've got the blood of Christ to claim and that's... that's all that matters to me.

INT: Did you or do you now consider the incident at Three Mile Island as related in any way to God and his instructing or disciplining of mankind?



NAR: Well, again, I guess it goes back to my basic view of the world and God's control. A lot of things I think are in the permissive will of God, in other words, He allows things to happen which may not be in his plan. He allows them to happen for several reasons. Number one, God never violates the will of man. Man can be just as rebellious as he wants and spit in God's face and God will take it. He'll do that. Because that's the way He is. The story of Job, for instance, is one where God may not have willed it that Job lose all of his possessions, lose his entire family, come down with boils and be just as miserable as can be, yet He allowed it to happen because... for various reasons. The same thing I think can be said here. God allows things to happen for different reasons. Why TMI happened, why God allowed TMI to occur, I don't know. I don't know why he allows Hurricane David to hit Santo Domingo and kill thousands of people. I don't understand those things. Those are what we call, you know, something like a hurricane is a natural disaster. They occur because that's the way our world has been created and set up, that those things do occur. There are other things that occur through the disobedience of man and because of man's inhumanity to man. I don't understand why things like... Uganda for the last 7 years has to occur, but I think again that that is a situation where the evil that is present in the world is allowed to continue, because God will not violate man's will. This is my concept of God. God could, if He wanted, but He has put that limit upon Himself. He said that, you know, if man says no to me, I won't force him.

INT: You said that you go to the Brethren In Christ Church. Over that weekend were you at a service there?

NAR: Regular services, yeah.

INT: That's on Sunday?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did anybody speak about TMI?

NAR: It was mentioned, yeah, again, in this same context that praise the Lord we got something that we can hang unto, something that is a stable force in the midst of everything else that is going on and we know that regardless of what happens, God still is going to be in control.

INT: Was it your minister who said that?

NAR: Yeah, I think it was Pastor Oak, or it may have been Pastor Wenger just in terms of the announcements. You know there were a number of people who had left the area. There weren't as many people in the service.

INT: Did that attendance at the service change your thoughts or feelings about the problem?

NAR: Not really. I realized how much more, you know I realized more I guess of how people were afraid and were... I guess I didn't realize before how many people were leaving the area.

INT: Was there anything in the service that made you feel different?

NAR: Not particularly. It was just a regular Sunday morning service. We really didn't do anything differently.

INT: Was it kind of reassuring, I guess, to hear those say thoughts that you have?

NAR: Yes.

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

NAR: Okay, read that again for me, Terry. (chuckles)

INT: This is the first time I read this one. What does your own faith say about the rightness and wrongness of man's desire to use and control atomic power?

NAR: Well, I don't think it speaks specifically to the rightness or wrongness of atomic power. A lot of course, I see rightness and wrongness as motivation. The rightness and wrongness of something is basically being the person's motivation behind it. The Bible doesn't speak specifically on atomic power. There are some theologians and scholars who think that references are made to atomic power in the Bible and to nuclear explosions and so on. But again, I don't think there is any rightness or wrongness that can be attached to that. The use that is made of it, you know, it can be used for good and it can be used for evil. Radiation therapy for cancer patients, I don't think anybody would argue with that, that that's been evil or bad. Diagnostic purposes, many of the tests that we rely on heavily in medicine employ nuclear energy and radiation. X-rays of course, that's a form of radiation. At the same time, obviously it can be used for evil. There's no question about that. Everybody recognizes that. I don't view TMI as basically either good or evil. The power plant there is basically good or evil.

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

NAR: No, not really. Again, for the same reasons.

INT: Is there anything else that you would like to add about all of this?

NAR: I don't think so, I think we covered the one thing that I, that I mentioned before that really disappointed me that I felt was the way that the news media really did not handle it the way it should. But as I say I did become a little bit cynical about the media.