

Date: October 4, 1979
Occupation: Medical Doctor

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

NARRATOR: I don't remember from whom. I guess we heard it over the radio or television on the day it happened. It was a terrible thing.

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

NAR: Oh yeah.

INT: And you knew approximately the distance that it was from you?

NAR: Oh yeah.

INT: What did you think about initially, did feel like it was a serious situation?

NAR: Definitely.

INT: Did you then seek out further information?

NAR: As well as we could. Everybody was in the same position. We had to depend upon the news media to tell us what was going on. We decided at least for my family, to do what we were instructed to do by those people in charge and to stay here in Carlisle and move if the time came to move. So we stayed.

INT: Did you talk about it a lot with your friends, family, co-workers?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did that change your attitude any as you continued to talk about it?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: I thought it was a typical reaction. I think people in the immediate area would have been expected to leave and most of them did. I think the people in our area pretty much responded the way I did. They listened to the news media and did what they were told. At least in the Carlisle area, it was pretty well controlled. What it was like around TMI, I don't know.

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

NAR: Yes.

INT: Were there some sources that you relied upon more than others?

NAR: Well, the second day of the Three Mile Island crisis, I went to a meeting in New York, OB/GYN Meeting. I was speaking at the meeting, as a matter of fact, and my wife and I had plugged into this in Carlisle as well as we were able and we were assured that things were safe and my in-laws came to look after my kids and when we arrived in NY the situation and feeling was entirely different than the Carlisle area. People were very much excited about it and very much worried. More so than we were here, as a matter of fact, the news media was, the television was playing it up much, much more than it was here and we were so concerned when we listened to the news broadcast that evening as soon as we got to New York, that we immediately called and we were going to return and they said nothing had changed as far as we were concerned. But according to the reports in New York, the newscasters there, the serious, the situation here was much more serious than people in the Carlisle area believed. So we didn't know what to believe. We were ready to turn around and come home. We thought that something had happened to make things worse and we would have left. When we had gone, they said everything was stable and there was really no great threat and no big problem. But when we got there the thinking was just the opposite.

INT: It was.

NAR: So we called here and they said well, nothing has changed and nothing has gotten any worse and we are still being told that it's okay and my in-laws were prepared if something happened to get the kids and leave. So we stayed in New York for a couple of days while I spoke at the meeting and then came home. But it was interesting that the news broadcast were entirely different in New York than what they were here in Carlisle.

INT: How did you feel about that? The media's attitude? Did that disturb you at all?

NAR: Yes. I thought at the time that possibly we were . . . they were down-playing it in this area to keep the people more calm and under control and prevent panic, but I also wondered if we were in the area really being told how serious it was. We wondered if New York broadcasters really had the straight scoop and the people had it and weren't telling it or really didn't have it. So this was a lot of concern. We were very upset when we first listened up there when we got up there as soon as we got to New York City. Yeah, so we kinda wondered whether we were in this area getting the real, the real information.

INT: How do you feel the government handled the incident?

NAR: Well, I think they handled it well. As far as what they did to control the situation, I think they handled it well. I don't know that, what was it, Con Ed? Met Ed . . . I think that were they allowed to continue reporting on it in their fashion we may not have heard

as much as we did and it may not have been as well controlled. But, that the government did a good job of controlling, of taking care of the situation.

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

NAR: No.

INT: Anybody you mistrusted?

NAR: [Laugh] No, I wouldn't say.

INT: Not even Met Ed?

NAR: Well, [laugh] It was very difficult to decide who to trust and who not. I think that once the government stepped in, I took the attitude I had to believe what they were telling me. I had no choice, so I did. I think that once the information on Met Ed came out by that time the government was really controlling the situation and I think were Met Ed to have continued to tell us what was going on, we may not have really known what was happening. And the situation may have degenerated, but as I say, I listened to what they said and believed what they told us to a degree. As far as evacuation is concerned, I still wonder whether we had been told the proper levels of radiation in the area. That is in the back of my mind. It very well may have been, but I wonder 20 years from now there might be some type of report might come out and says well here it was higher. I don't really believe that...I tend to think that even if the radiation levels were higher there wouldn't be too much you could do about it. I've just taken the attitude that the government has taken. Radiation...(unintelligible)...and we can't change that. It was that way and it's not bad enough to have people move from the area but we may expect many years from now to see some effects from it. I hope that's not the situation, but I think that it's a possibility.

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

NAR: I think I alternately felt they were in control and out of control, but I was always hoping they were in control. It's a little difficult being out of the area, as I say. You only know what they tell you on the radio and the television and newspapers.

INT: That was enough to make you uneasy, a little?

NAR: Oh, of course. Sure.

INT: Do you feel like they are in control now?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Were you worried about the situation?

NAR: Of course.

INT: What worried you the most?

NAR: Well, I think probably what worried everyone is what is termed a melt-down. From my understanding of this, were that to have occurred, radiation would have been spilled into the table beneath the ground under the Susquehanna River and Chesapeake Bay and a large area would have needed to be evacuated in the state of Pennsylvania and in the states southeast of Pennsylvania...without being able to be returned to for many, many years. The water would have been contaminated and the ground would be contaminated. So for me, that's what worried me the most. I wasn't really concerned about, for instance, an explosion, disseminating radioactive material although I guess that was a possibility. The melt-down was a real concern to me. It is very difficult to visualize a how many mile radius being evacuated around TMI and not being returned to for quite a number of years.

INT: Did you change any of your ordinary routines? You mentioned that you were going to New York anyhow and you proceeded with that plan, but were there other things that you had to change?

NAR: We didn't change anything really. We of course made plans with my in-laws if we had to move to take certain things from the house that were necessary but other than that, we didn't change anything. My kids went to school and functioned as they were told to, and we went to New York and returned as we were supposed to, so we did pretty much the same things we had planned.

INT: If you would have had to leave your home was there anything specific that you felt you had to bring with you?

NAR: [Laugh] Well, the only things we needed, I guess, were some important papers, diplomas and things of this nature. I would hate to get stuck out of the area and not be able to return and then have to have somebody want to prove that I'm a doctor of medicine and surgery, more than everything else. It would take you maybe a year to get that done or more. So, those type of things, just important papers, nothing else.

INT: Was there someone in your life that you were watching in order to see what they do before you decided?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you have any real mental pictures of what was happening at TMI or what might happen? You mentioned the melt-down, did you visualize that?

NAR: I think you always conjure up a picture of something that would have happened. Whether my picture is accurate, I really don't know because I don't know really what a melt-down would appear. So yes, I had a picture of what I think it might be like.

INT: Do you want to elaborate a little on that? What you had envisioned...

NAR: Well, what I envisioned was that the radioactive material within the reactor would become dispersed within, beneath the ground and into our water tables and various tables underneath the ground and become dispersed over a wide area. Not disseminated so much into the atmosphere but disseminated into the earth itself and into our water.

INT: Were there any other aspects of your life that were affected by this incident? Other than your personal life and your family?

NAR: Well, we had many patients calling for information, of course. So...

INT: What was your advice to patients?

NAR: Well, our advice was simply to listen to the media, if evacuation were to take place, to evacuate. If not, do as they were told. We did not advise termination of pregnancies, for instance, because of TMI. Although all the while, we had several people asked in early pregnancy whether they should have their pregnancies terminated because of the radiation effect possible on the early fetus. We had pregnant girls call and ask if they should leave the area immediately and many other people simply called for information assuming the physician would have more information than the televisions and the newspapers.

INT: If the worst had occurred, what do you think might have happened? Just the melt-down...to you, is that the worst?

NAR: Well, I think it's part of the worst. I imagine I don't know whether you can have a melt-down as well as a dissemination of radioactive material into the atmosphere. I imagine both can occur although I don't know that that's true. I think the melt-down would have been bad enough but if to have the other thing occur also and to have a breeze carry it over a large area that of course would be even worse, because that way there would be an immediate effect on the populous. Whereas a melt-down, from the way I understand it, we would have had a chance to get out of the area. The area would have been evacuated for a long time and you would not have been subject to radioactive material as you would in the atmosphere. You would have dispersed. So, however, that might occur, I think that would be worse than a melt-down.

INT: How do you think it might have affected your health? Did you think about it affecting your own health?

NAR: Well, do you mean the ways things were or the way things might have been?

INT: At that point, kind of, did you think about it having an effect on your health?

NAR: Well, with the reports we were getting, I really didn't consider it having much effect on me, provided what we heard was true. I really don't think it had an effect on anybody's health provided everything we were told about it was true. If in fact it was worse than we had known then yes, it very well may, but as far as I'm concerned 20 years from now which is maybe when I would expect to find something from the radiation that's occurring right now and I'll probably be a relatively old man by then so, it didn't worry me too much for me but I'm concerned about my kids and young people. It takes ten, twenty years from now, makes them thirty, it would be an awful thing if leukemias or illness crop up at that time or the next generation we were delivering, the next obstetrician would be delivering abnormal fetuses then problems would occur over (unintelligible).

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

NAR: I had some initial concern about food and milk in the area but we were told that it was okay and able to be used and we did.

INT: Did you ever picture in your mind the effects of radiation? You talked about it disseminating, but did you picture what it might do to life around you?

NAR: Well, I think if you read any accounts of people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, you can visualize pretty much would happen from an acute dose of radiation large enough to kill within a few days. I know what would happen there. Of course, a smaller dose generally affects people over a long period of time, so...(unintelligible)...yes, so I know what would happen here if were exposed to the radiation.

INT: Did you ever think of your own death?

NAR: No, I didn't think of my dying from the situation. I thought of being exposed to the radiation with a possible affect in later years. I didn't consider being killed outright, if that's what you mean.

INT: What about that of others, people closer to you?

NAR: Oh yes. I thought that was a definitely possibility with people around Three Mile Island.

INT: What reassured you that you would survive? Just the distance that you are from there?

NAR: Yes, I thought that we were far enough away to survive any initial acute problem so I thought, alright, our problem here would more likely be something from a large dose of radiation causing problems several years from now, not immediately.

INT: Did you think about god at all during the incident?

NAR: Not that I know of.

INT: It wasn't like this was part of his plan or something?

NAR: I definitely did not think that.

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

NAR: Yes, I did.

INT: Did any of those seem to conflict between maybe your family and your practice?

NAR: Well, only that in the time I was here and then after I returned from New York, as a physician, I assumed that we would be in the area, if evacuated, we would be the last or some of that last people to leave if we were to leave. So yes, I thought about being separated from my family.

INT: Fortunately you didn't have to work on those conflicts.

NAR: It really wouldn't be a conflict. I think as a physician you have to understand your responsibilities. You may be needed. Your family's out somewhere and relatively safe and you may be needed at that time...(unintelligible)

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

NAR: Well, sure. Some physical things, many more mental things.

INT: A lot more time, do you think, spent seeing patients and reassuring them than ordinarily?

NAR: Yeah, more time. I wouldn't say a lot more, but more time of course.

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

NAR: Well, as I said as a physician you are going to be in the area until everybody is evacuated if you are needed, so yes, I thought that's what I would do. I assumed that the other physicians in the area would do the same thing. It's part of our obligation, I think. We are obligated to care for the people who are in need of your care and should emergencies arise, you'd be in the area of the emergency, so that you'd be remaining here until things are taken care of. Anybody hurt or injured would get evacuated and then you get out yourself.

INT: At the time, did this event bring to mind any past experiences? You mentioned Hiroshima, Nagasaki, was there anything that you thought about?

NAR: Nothing, nothing similar except the WWII bombs.

INT: Had anything like this happened to you specifically before?

NAR: No.

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

NAR: Well, it was more frightening than a flood and more frightening than a hurricane and less frightening than a war.

INT: Especially if you are out on the battleground, I guess.

NAR: Well, anyway at all.

INT: Did any of the TV shows or movies that you might have seen come to mind?

NAR: Are you talking about during the crisis?

INT: Mmhmm.

NAR: Just a few that we heard in New York, but they seemed to be so contradictory.

INT: Were there any books or stories that you'd read in the past that made you think and recollect them during your experience?

NAR: Yes, I don't remember the name of the book anymore. I read a lot of books and can't remember half the names of them, but it was a story about maybe 98 or 99% of the population being annihilated and destroyed by nuclear energy. And, although, I don't think we are dealing with that kind of thing here, but still it pointed out the power of nuclear power.

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

NAR: Regarding TMI?

INT: Mmhmm.

NAR: I don't think. Daydreams kinda get straight in your mind what you want to do if something does happen. You can deal more in reality. When you fantasize what might happen, I'm sure that everybody, as you asked me before, what did I consider the worst that could happen.

INT: That could have be part, like of the daydream?

NAR: I think that since you're not involved with the situation firsthand and you really don't understand exactly what a melt-down means and don't understand exactly what the reactor looks like, you have to kind of visualize sort of, that's daydreaming. I kinda consider daydream dealing with fantasy. Although you may consider fantasy what you consider will happen at that particular point, to you that's reality.

INT: It's a fine line I guess.

NAR: Yeah.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams or was your sleep disturbed from this at all?

NAR: No, it wasn't. It wasn't any disturbance. It was getting ready for my talk in New York, rather than TMI.

INT: Were there changes that you think that happened to people around you during the incident?

NAR: Oh, I'm sure. I don't know of any radical specific changes but there were some people getting out of the area, selling houses, staying away for good and living in shelters.

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

NAR: Some people. Unless you . . . I'm sure it changed some people, there's no doubt about it. But unless you sold your house or moved out of the area, and decided to become an anti-nuclear activist or some such thing, I imagine that everyone settled back down to living again. Some part of TMI occasionally can't pass the place or see the reactors without thinking about it. So, a few people I'm sure but I don't really know them.

INT: You don't feel like you've been changed in any lasting way other than more of an awareness?

NAR: Right, just more aware.

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

NAR: I didn't hear any jokes, I saw some T-shirts, but I didn't hear any jokes.

INT: What was your response to that?

NAR: As in most of those things, just money making schemes.

INT: Did you think they were funny?

NAR: Well, after the whole thing was over you could look at it like that but the T-shirts that I saw simply said "I Survived Three Mile Island".

INT: Not any real black humor? Why do you suppose there was so much joking in the way of graffiti and T-shirts and...?

NAR: I didn't really realize that there was. Well, I imagine it's a reaction. We tend to look at things we are afraid of and make jokes about them because we really don't want to admit our fears, so one of the ways to compensate and reduce our fear, and appear that we're not afraid is to joke. So, maybe that's why.

INT: Can you ever in any other crisis situation, say when the Kennedys were assassinated or during Jonestown, Guyana, can you remember any joking from those incidents?

NAR: Well, I certainly don't remember any joking from the Kennedy assassination. I don't remember from Guyana either.

INT: Have you developed an opinion about nuclear energy?

NAR: Yes, I have an opinion. I said before, I think it's something difficult to know whether your opinion is exactly correct when you don't have first hand information and I'm not involved directly. But I feel that energy crisis in which we are right now, on the face of that energy crisis, we need some type of energy we can count upon, count on and I think that nuclear energy at the moment is that answer. But I feel that it has to be very well controlled. I feel that it was not very well controlled at Three Mile Island. I don't know exactly how to control it well, but I think it's needed and I think it has to be under some strict controls, some strict regulatory control. Just seemed to me, that I guess that the people at Three Mile Island were going to work and pulling the switches and checking the lights and going about it in a dull way and not paying a whole lot of attention to the possibility of having a disaster. I don't think it can be run like that. I think It's got the potential for destroying the countryside and all the living things in that countryside. You have to have people who are on their toes every second of the time. Seemed to me that this is not what was going on there. I do think that we can use nuclear energy and control it and use it to our advantage

INT: Is there anything else that you'd like to add? Comments? Questions?

NAR: No.