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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

Name: Bob Neal

Date Interviewed: 05/05/99

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Tape 13

Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP0025

01:01:06:00

Q:

Ok. The first question we ask everybody is a real hard one. (Laugh)

A:

Sure. Bob Neal.

Q:

Right. And can you spell your last name for us?

A:

N-E-A-L

Q:

Ok, just wanted to make sure we had it right. Um, how long have you lived in the area?

A:

All my life; 62 years and a half.

Q:

Great.

A:

Yeah. I grew up in Northside. Moved to North College Hill. Moved to Groesbeck. Moved to Miamitown, and now I live in Cheviot. So, ah (Response: Great). So I've been here all my live. So, on the western side of Hamilton County.

01:01:44:07

Q:

So, where did you go to school?

A:

Ah grade school I went to St. Boniface Grade School, and ah Roger Bacon High School. And one year at University of Cincinnati.

01:01:55:08

Q:

FER\FLHP\TRANS\FLHP-13.WPD\February 23, 2005 9:42AM

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

Great. What did you study at UC?

A:
Chemistry. Yeah.

Q:
(Laugh) So you could work in the lab. Um, Ok. Tell us a little bit about your ah, job at Fernald?
How did you get your job there first of all?

A:
Well, ah, I saw in the newspaper, they had a very large ad in the newspaper. I guess I was, I guess I was about half way through my first year at UC, ah when I saw this very large ad in the newspaper and ah, covered an entire page. They had ah, interviews downtown at some hotel, and I don't recall the name of it.

01:02:31:24

But anyhow I went downtown and got into the wrong hotel. Ah, got on the elevator, told the what I thought to be the elevator operator to ah hit floor eighteen. And he gave me kind of a strange look, and hit floor eighteen. I got up there and there was nothing there. Ah, except rooms and hallways. And eventually figured it out and turned around, came back down.

01:02:58:05

Went to another hotel or asked questions I think as I said before, you know. Like most men do when we need direction, we ask the question and ah, I found out it was in another hotel. Went up there and applied, found out it was a very large room with quite a few people. There was, there was a lot of people applying. But apparently there was a lot of jobs to be had too.

01:03:22:25

So anyway, that's ah that's how I applied. And they, I don't recall how they mentioned, I don't even know if I had to take a test, not any more. I'm sure I did. They'd at least have to know if, how to write and add, I'm convinced of that.

Q:
How did they explain to you what the plant did when they were hiring you?

01:03:45:08

A:
I'm not sure that they did. And if they did I don't recall and it probably wouldn't have made a bit of difference to me. If ah, 'cause I wanted a job. I don't recall them explaining it at all what was going on. Ah, I did, if, if there was any explanation it would probably come from the newspaper article. Cause I don't remember if anyone even interviewed me.

01:04:13:12

Ah, Forrest Jenkins would have been the who'd, who had interviewed me if he, if it was. I recall

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

seeing him at the, at the application room, but I don't recall having an interview with him. So ah, and he's the one who met me at the door, when I got to Fernald the very first day. So ah, I would assume he was kind of following up on it so.

01:04:40:29

Q:

And what position did he have?

A:

He was the uh, I believe he was a lab director. Uh, one of the, yeah I think he was one of directors of the lab, probably a smaller one, uh lower director, not the big one of course but that would probably be his position there.

01:05:05:22

Q:

Describe your first day at work; what was that like?

A:

Yeah, I was afraid you'd ask that question. First day at work. I don't remember the orientation at all. The one thing I can remember about the first day of work was that I walked into the door, met Forrest Jenkins, walked by what I thought was to be the water fountain and said excuse me I'd like to get a drink and he says that's the eyewash fountain. And I said, Oh. I thought, this is a good story.

01:05:38:23

So then they took me back to the, what they call the sample lab, which is the starting point for most new technicians and uh had introduced me to the guys back there. Uh, Everett Henry and Gene Shike and they showed me the ropes and started to work right away. 'Cause everybody was busy. There was a lot of work in the laboratory, a lot of work in the laboratory and so we started right into it and I started training right away. I don't recall reading any books or any manuals--it was just go for it you know, so.

01:06:17:00

Q:

So it was pretty much on-the-job training?

A:

Yes, very pragmatic. Just get there and get the job done and that's about what it was for me. (Laughter) My entire stay was get there and get the job done, so.

01:06:36:04

Q:

Was the site still under construction when you started? What phase were they in?

A:

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

I would have thought they would have been finished by then. I'm not sure, there might have been something that was not finished. If it was, it would have been very minor. Uh, there might have been a third part of the lab that had to be finished yet. Uh, the lab came in three sections as I recall. Three hallways at least. A third hallway might still have been there. And there again, I'm not sure about that, but the first two hallways were of course there so. But the rest of the construction, all the plants were, I'm convinced were constructed. And the laboratory being kind of remote, if there was any construction going on on the other side of Plant 6 or something like that, I would never have known it anyway. I would not have gotten outside to find out so I think that's the extent of that.

01:07:31:27

Q:

And what year did you start?

A:

I guess it was '55. '55 or '56. Yeah, I graduated from Bacon in 1954, at the end of '54. And then went to UC and it would have been '55, so it would have been in '55 and I would have went to... That doesn't add up, there's a year missing somewhere but that's all right. (Laughter)

Q:

In the general vicinity.

A:

That's right. Yeah.

01:08:05:05

Q:

Um, tell us what a typical day was like? What were you guys doing in the lab at the time?

A:

That depends on which lab I'm in. I worked them all uh, except one. I worked the thorium lab, refinery lab, sample lab, metals lab, green salt lab, orange lab and even got in a little bit of the instrumentation. The fluorimetric lab I did not work and then the instrumental labs on the other side, the mass spectrometry labs and things like that. I didn't work those either.

01:08:36:12

I was wet all chemistry. So it depended which one you were in that would make the day, a typical day quite a bit different. Uh, the one I worked the most in would be later is the one I basically was in when I left which was the green salt lab for Plant 4. A typical day there would have been to show up at 4:00 in the afternoon and start grinding samples and sieving them through, sieving them through a, I'm not sure, a 100 mesh screen.

01:09:13:14

I'm not sure about the mesh anymore, maybe 80 mesh, so that they would be fine enough to dissolve in perchloric acid and things like that, sulfuric acid and then analyzed what they call groups of reactors which is the reaction products as it's going along and then the final product which would be the green

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

salt itself for purity and impurities. So they would start off by grinding the samples. Then preparing for a total uranium analysis and then preparing for ammonium oxalate insoluble analysis and then uh determination of the plus 4 uranium that's in there.

01:10:00:24

And then from there we would calculate the other impurities which would be the UO_2F_2 and I'm not sure if they had a name or not but uh, then we'd be able to calculate that. And the in later years we also had the, a water determination that would pick up, the UO_2F_2 would absorb water so therefore it would be an additional determination to find out how much water was in there would also help indicate how much UO_2F_2 was in there so.

01:10:38:00

And then we would have acid samples. Hydrofluoric acid samples would come in needed to be analyzed for percent HF and we would do that too in our spare time and there was not very much spare time. Two guys work in this lab and it was, it was a lot of work. And we worked very hard.

01:11:07:00

Q:

And you worked at night?

A:

For the most part, yeah. Toward the end I got day shift but uh, second shift 4:00-12:30. 4:00-12:30 would be the most times. They tried rotating shifts once in a while. People on third shift got upset cause they always got stuck on third shift. So I'd switch with them and I didn't like third shift and they didn't like second shift so we'd switch back, but uh, everybody wanted day shift and finally I got it so. Then I quit, but I'm not sure how long I was on day shift before I quit, it's been a while.

01:11:50:00

Q:

Wow, that sounds like a lot of work. Tell us about working in the thorium lab; what was that like?

A:

Well there wasn't much, I did no analysis on the thorium. I worked in the thorium lab and that's because it was called the thorium lab. There was thorium in the back room, it had a little room all by itself and I saw it, I touched it, whatever, you know. But I never analyzed it for anything. And I'm not so sure we were even analyzing for thorium at that time. We just called it the thorium lab and we used it for other analysis. We stored sodium in there under water you know, or not under water sorry, under oil so it wouldn't explode and things like that.

01:12:34:11

And we would use it for titrations that couldn't be done in the other labs. If there wasn't any room on the bench, we would move things down to the thorium lab and work down there. So it was kind of an extra lab back in the corner that. It was kind of an all utility lab. And they eventually moved the thorium out of that lab and was never brought back, to the best of my knowledge. I still don't know how bad that stuff really is but, uh. (Response - It's not great.)

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

Well, yeah.

01:13:06:23

Q:

I mean, the thing that's interesting too is that they had a huge warehouse out there, you know the thorium warehouse out near Plant 9 (Response - I didn't know that.) They had to finish moving that stuff out of there cause the drums were starting to give way (Response - Yeah, yeah.) Which was bad.

Well, that brings back memories of Plant 8.

01:13:23:16

Q:

Plant 8, were you out in the plants much?

A:

No, not at all. I was never in the plants except for tours. But Plant 8 was right across from the labs and in the summertime you could look out the windows and watch the fires start. I mean the drums would just combust just because it's hot. Hell, it was 110 - 120 degrees in the lab you know, that's an exaggeration Bob, I told you a million times not to exaggerate. It was probably it was over 100 maybe 110 cause we had no air conditioning and guys would work in there at best their t-shirts and shorts.

01:14:02:07

Cause you had hot plates sitting everywhere to cook and boil these things. Anyway, it's hot outside too and the drums stored alongside Plant 8, the scraps would just combust, start on fire see, call the fire department, they'd come over, squirt the water on it, cool it down, go back, 2 hours later psst, call them up again. This might happen 2 or 3 times a night. Didn't happen every night by any means but it happened a lot.

01:14:31:08

And it wasn't 'til later, like you were talking about before, you know, it's a different time, a different era and a different attitude towards things and it wasn't till later that I realized; where the hell's all that water going, you know. That water's washing scrap uranium into this gravel, now where's it going? You see, and then I find we're sitting over the Great Miami Aquifer. And it's scary stuff and that's when you go back and say all those stories you hear about Fernald are true.

01:15:03:26

You know, and there are some others but you know, but at the time it's just nice to get the fire out cause you didn't know, no one ever thought it was going to you know, have a chain reaction type thing. I don't think there was anything, at least my attitude was that there was never anything fissionable enough to ever cause a large problem, just fires.

01:15:29:23

Q:

We talked to one of the fire fighters that told us about that too.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:
Is that right?

Q:
Yeah.

A:
Same type thing?

Q:
Yeah, said out at Plant 6 too.

A:
Did they really?

Q:
That was a bad place for uranium. Down near the Rolling Mill and stuff.

A:
OK.

Q:
Yeah.

A:
They had shavings and, might have been the very same stuff that was at Plant 8 for all I know. Cause I'm sure they just scoop it up and throw it in a drum, take it over to the dump.

Q:
They used to make it into briquettes and then they would figure out how pure that was and then if it was worth remelting they would remelt it.

A:
I see.

Q:
Or whatever they did with it. It was kind of interesting.

01:16:02:17

A:
But those were the fires and it was different, a different world. Never told anybody about that but you know, I wouldn't rat on anyone. But that was probably an unsafe thing. But safety was not, safety was not a concern back then it was production. Production was king and you had Mallinicrodt, and you had Hanford, Rocky Flats or whatever it is. I'm not sure really how many we were competing with.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

Mostly Mallincredit and we just had to beat them on price or we were out of business and safety was not even brought into the problem you know situation.

01:16:46:10

Q:

How much did you know about the process at the time?

A:

Which time?

Q:

While you were working there.

A:

Oh, I knew quite a bit about it. I mean the general things about it uh, how it went from the ore digested in the nitric acid and uh oxidized to UO_3 and then fluorinated to UF_4 then with the prochlorates or the magnesium, I'm sorry, mag fluoride or putting the magnesium and getting mag fluoride and getting the uranium derby and melting it down and rolling it out, cutting it off. So I knew that much about it. I didn't know all, or which dials to hit or which buttons to push, but I knew what the process was.

01:17:39:54

Q:

Were you able to discuss your job with your family at all? What exactly did you tell them when they asked?

A:

I guess I initially started off telling them they couldn't ask and they never. That's pretty much it. Feed Material Production Center and that's as much as they knew and uh, I guess I told them I made uranium and that's about it. We had at one time, we had enriched uranium. I never gave a number you know the degree of enrichment or anything like that. And we had something else can't remember the darn stuff. I don't know, it came with a red and silver label, I think red, green and silver label on it and it was special.

01:18:31:08

A:

It was enriched but it was special and it was going to be used for something that we weren't supposed to know anything about. And I only heard one thing about it and it was supposed to be for Project Rover. Which was going to be the uh, roving out in outer space. They were going to use this, the way I guessed it was going to emit, the emissions from the uranium were going to be used as a propellant to for space exploration. Wish I could think of the name of that darn stuff. But anyway that was the stuff and it was special too.

01:19:12:24

FER\FLHP\TRANS\FLHP-13.WPD\February 23, 2005 9:42AM

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:

It had higher enrichments I believe but I'm not sure what they were either. See the enrichments I remember, and I'm sure I'm permitted to say this (oh sure, yeah). See, see they work on your head. They got you forever. Seems like the normal is .24 and the enrich was .97 something like that. I think this stuff was 2.5. I believe that's what it was. Yeah. That may have been what we called it, 2.5 for what I recall. But that's the stuff that was possibly going to be used to propel us into oblivion perhaps I don't know. That wasn't its intention. Its intention was to propel us into outer space. So I heard, so I heard. ----- shield right up his back, heck, I was ready to go for anything then you know so.

01:20:11:18

Q:

How did you feel about uh your job as far as it related to the nation at the time?

A:

Yeah, well at the beginning of course, I felt quite important. Thought it was really important that I do this and uh do it well. Because this wasn't too far remote from World War II where we used quite a bit and we were still testing quite a few atomic weapons. And we had no nuclear power plants at that time that I recall. Uh, but uh, it was strictly going to be rough grade material and the stuff we had was going to be sent to Portsmouth for, for what was it? Diffusion? I can't recall what it was called now, can't remember if there was a prior term to diffusion.

01:21:02:00

A:

Well, anyway and be enriched for bombs and we needed those at that time so I felt very patriotic and uh, felt like I should be, well, I just felt good about myself. It was a good feeling to know what I was doing. Cause I never went into the Army, not that I wanted to by any means but.

01:21:27:12

Q:

How about later on?

A:

Later on. Uh, again you know you work with familiarity breeds contempt. You know after a while it's treated with disdain you know you're just, it gets on your shoes, you don't worry about it. Like I told the story before and I can't recall this guy's name, it's a grumpy son-of-a-gun, but he was working day shift in the green salt lab when I was working second shift, as I recall. And he was just in there as a temporary because someone was on vacation and we had a lot of work to do and this guy was running it all by himself.

01:22:17:05

A:

I don't see how he did it and he was crabby anyway and the sample guy brought some more reactors. Reactors really ugly cause they're just, they got more impurities in them than any other thing therefore they clog things up more than anything else, so it takes longer to run them than it would a finished

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

product which was rather a smooth process. So, so they were a pain and he told the guy in the sample lab that he didn't want any more goddamn samples and uh, the sample guy had to bring them up anyway.

01:22:59:08

A:

So he walked in and just sat them down. He said I told you I didn't want anymore, and he just took the whole bunch of them and threw them out in the hall and they smashed, went all over the floor. Anyway, so that shows, my attitude wasn't quite that bad. Toward the end I was OK with it, you know, it was just old hat stuff and that would have been back in what '63 or so or '64.

01:23:27:10

A:

I'm not sure what the world was doing at that time but I don't recall, I don't recall any great feeling of patriotism at that point, I was just happy to get out. And I guess the reason I was happy to get out was 'cause there was a lot of layoffs and that was enough for me. That changed my entire attitude toward the whole thing.

01:23:54:24

Q:

Why were layoffs so imminent at that point?

A:

Well, they, I guess it was just being phased out, I don't know. Mallincredit was already out of business I think at that time. They'd already been shut down. And people were just, it just seemed like a dying industry and it was going and I just didn't want to put up with it anymore. It was a strange thing because you know we had a guy in the lab who worked also in Plant 2 and he would work third shift in our labs and then he would kind of switch back and forth between the Plant 2 lab which is the refinery lab and our labs, our labs in our wet chemistry labs.

01:24:40:48

A:

He was Cliff Harris I think, he finally quit and uh, he finally quit, well let me go back. Cliff would always come in with a rumor. He was out in the plant and he would always come in with a rumor. Gonna have some layoffs, never have, never have. Yeah Cliff we know, gottcha Cliff you know, well one day it happened and that was it. He come in with a rumor once a month and we believed every one of them. Ten guys got laid off in the laboratory and it was scary business you know. And someone told me I was number 11.

01:25:14:19

A:

So that's what they told me you know I don't know whether they were playing with my head or what, I had no idea. But that didn't matter, I was scared so every time Cliff came in after that he uh, I believed every word he said. And that bothered me. That bothered me quite a bit. And so I went out

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

and I just started looking for jobs then, not, that's when I went back to school. I started going back to evening college then I did and I got on the dean's list a couple of times and got some more education behind me and uh, then I started going out and looking for jobs.

01:25:50:04

A:

And this guy in the lab named Gil Cunningham who was working second shift with me, not in, not in the green salt lab, working second shift, he was in refinery salt lab as I recall. He was going to Xavier, well Miami University during the day to get his degree. And he got his degree and went out looking for a job. He got a job with some place over in Norwood called Permanent Pigments which was promptly bought up by Denny and Smith, Crayola Crayon people and he said, he was a good friend of mine, and he says Bob, how about you coming with me. And I said, I'm with ya Gil; let's go.

01:26:30:22

A:

Well, Gil talked to his new bosses and his new bosses said no, I didn't have enough education, so I didn't get the job. That blew me away so then I just decided it was time for me to get. So I started looking and I must have interviewed at 4 or 5 different places. Even went up to the Mound up in Dayton. Which would have been a terribly long drive but that's how desperate I was to get out of there.

01:26:55:26

A:

I had really made up my mind I wasn't going to work here any longer. But then, I decided to try Procter and Gamble at the Miami Valley labs on my way home and did and they hired me on a Friday. I'm sorry, they interviewed me on a Friday, they hired me that very same afternoon. That next Monday morning when I went to work Jim Polk came down and said congratulations. And I said how did you know.

01:27:22:18

A

He says they just called. I said why the hell would they be calling you for. He says, well, you'll be going to Mound. No, I'm not going to Mound, I said. So Mound came in, so I had two jobs and uh, so I didn't, I certainly didn't take Mound by any means and I took P&G and stayed there 25 years. Twenty-five years, 26 maybe. I don't recall.

01:27:44:26

Q:

When it rains, it pours right.

A:

Yeah, yeah, which it was fine. It was a good way to go that time so anyway. Anyway getting back to Cliff. Cliff and a bunch of guys at Fernald got together and went into sort of pumping oil down in Kentucky. They were getting 9 barrels a day or something like that out of this thing. And they didn't

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

make very much money. They put \$1500 a piece in it and they didn't make very much money. But Cliff finally wound up saying, getting into coal.

01:28:16:05

A:

He became a millionaire. I think he's dead now, someone told me he died 10 or 15 years ago, who knows how. Cliff was always nervous. Always hitching up his pants, always hitching his pants. You know. Always talking with his shoulders and his arms and everything else. Big, big deal guy. You know, he was a nice guy and he also used to run the football pool. Anyway, he'd bring in the football cards. Anyway, he finally, he finally got into coal and I don't know where he was down in Kentucky but he became a millionaire pretty rapidly selling coal, or mining coal or whatever he was doing with it so.

01:28:54:29

Q:

Wow.

A:

Yeah. It's pretty neat stuff.

We're going to take a break for a second while we change our tapes.

Tape FLHP0026

02:01:01:21

A:

You can sit in the wheelbarrow. My granddaughter loves to sit in that wheelbarrow.

She'll go to sleep.

I'll get ya a pillow.

02:01:11:25

Q:

OK. Um, let's talk a little bit, first of all, about um, the types of people who worked um at Fernald. You mentioned that there were some racial lines drawn kind of, if you could explain that.

A:

Yeah, well I, I never saw any blacks in the, in any of the in any of the plants. Uh, and the only blacks that were in the laboratory, I wasn't in the plant very often so there could have been black porters there. But the only plant, the only blacks in the laboratory were porters and uh, at the time I didn't think that too strange. As I look back upon it, I think it's, I think it's a sorry commentary of what we were then. We were what we were. Maybe they even expected it, I don't know.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

02:02:19:20

A:

You know after a while I think if people tell you you're going to be in a certain position you eventually accept that and go on. But uh, I think they were also ridiculed and that part I didn't like because there was one named Harrison and they took great delight in teasing him about snakes and things like that and somebody brought in a horse hair or something and I don't you know, you stick it in water and it curls or something and they convinced Harrison that it was a snake or something.

02:03:02:15

A:

And, I swear, I don't remember if I saw that or rather somebody told me about it and I got a picture in my mind of it. OK. But it was the talk of the laboratory and a big laugh about how Harrison went (mouth sounds) you know and ran away from this beaker full of water with the horse hair in it that he thought was a snake. You know and I, but back then I wasn't a liberal either. I was a Goldwater Republican is what I was. And, and, first of all I'm very glad I'm changing.

02:03:41:27

A:

I feel so much better with myself. I'm not near as angry. I don't hate as much and all this stuff. I don't find fault with people like I did before. Of course it's not a political commentary, however, we did, we did have respect for the blacks as far as their abilities to, to play ball. The same things that we've got today. You know, their dancing, uh, sexual prowess. All the things that everybody thinks and they're maybe all myths for all I know. And those things we thought about them but we also considered them uh, inferior in intelligence and stuff like that.

02:04:22:07

A:

To the point where I actually mentioned one time that I had read that a black, blacks can not be good at mathematics. They did not have the mind for mathematics and a guy named Bob Wilson called me on it and said if one black can do it then they all can do it. And I started waking up. I was glad he did that for me. But uh, so I was appalled that the only blacks in the place were porters.

02:05:04:12

A:

But then, I quit and went to Procter and Gamble and there ain't one damn black in the whole building. Not even a porter. They've got a bunch of Indiana farmers that come in on second shift and kick around being porters over there because it's part of their culture. In addition, we had a, at P&G we had a southern aristocrat gentleman.

02:05:32:19

A:

I can't think of his name, you know a southern gentleman, who was a lab director, a research director cause that's basic research over there and he just wouldn't hire any of them no matter what happens. But I'm not sure that wasn't true in all the company, but there weren't any porters, there weren't any

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

blacks over there at all so in that respect again in retrospect, Fernald did a better job than P&G did. The great P&G so.

02:06:02:05

Q:

And you mentioned to me a gentleman who had a Miami degree but couldn't...?

A:

Yeah, this guy I saw over at, over at the yearly physical, where we get our yearly physical over at Drake Hospital. I was sitting there talking to him and he said that when he was, when he went to get hired at Fernald that the only thing they would offer him was porter. And he told them, he says you know, I'm getting a degree at Miami University and that's all you can give me is porter. And they said yeah, that's all we can give you.

02:06:39:22

A:

He took it, cause obviously, because he's getting his physical every year, I assume every year. But that had to be pretty humiliating to the gentleman. He remembers it. And he's probably still bitter about it. I never asked him that part. I would be. So. Because I was probably stationed ahead of him and maybe shouldn't have been. Don't know. Part of the times.

02:07:11:12

Q:

Tell me a little bit about the medical monitoring program. You're on that now? And how did you get involved in that.

A:

I think I got something in the mail. And I just said sure, I'll take it. I need to, I had bypass surgery so it's a good idea for me to have checkups routinely anyway so if they're willing to do that and pay for it, I'm willing to take advantage of it. I think they do a fine job. They're really pretty nice for the most part. I've not had, the last time I had a little trouble the lady couldn't find my vein but uh, I think she, yeah, oh yeah. 3 or 4 times. She finally quit and let somebody else do it. I felt sorry for her.

02:08:01:16

A:

It wasn't much fun for me either, but I think it was even less fun for her because she was really embarrassed. (Comment - Oh, man.) But the hematoma wasn't too bad. But it's a nice ----- They've treated me pretty nice. (Comment - That's good.) Except when one lady doctor, still burns me a little bit. I'm laying on this thing, on whatever a slab, whatever that thing is and she wants to punch my belly and so she reaches down and I can remember she says nice abs, now relax.

02:08:39:17

A:

What the hell is she talking about? And, she was thinking that I was, I was a little bit nervous you

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

know, woman doctor, I had never had, so she was obviously thinking that I was flexing, or whatever you call it. Strengthening my stomach muscles to impress her or something. That's the only thing I can figure. So I, and I worked at it and worked at it and finally got it relaxed and after I got out of there I got kind of angry. I thought who the hell does she think she is. I mean, I like girls and all, but anyway, so I had to tell you that story. (Comment - Oh my gosh.) (Laughter)

02:09:26:12

Q:

Um, you mentioned a couple of times where there were a few emergencies while you were working at Fernald. One of them was the plasma pressure blew?

A:

Yeah, that was Charlie Oblinger I thinking, and Forrest Jenkins again. They had a project, I think they were trying to, to set up plasma, or trying to create plasma, to keep them controlled. And this one wasn't controlled and they had a blow out valve, about that big around in the back of the laboratory building that ah, that the pressure got too great and could not be controlled, or it would go. Well, out it went. Then you'd have thought, shot heard around the world, I mean cause it reverberated everywhere.

02:10:06:10

A:

Telephones ringing and you know, what the hell's going on; you know all this kind of stuff you know and uh, and we had some hex releases from Pilot Plant. Hexafluoride releases and ah, there weren't very many of those, but there were a couple. People were, we had to scatter and get out of the labs, move to the outside. I'm not sure that was the best idea or not, but that's where they took us. Ah. The ah, there was a fire in the sample room again, kind of a spontaneous combustion type thing.

02:10:43:25

A:

Where Gene Shike, one of the guys, put it out himself instead of waiting for the fire department. I can recall his face being quite red and I don't think it was embarrassment, it was from flames. And he was, he was ah, I wouldn't say reprimanded because that sounds like he lost time or something like that. But he was really told about it strenuously; he should not be doing that. However, the damn place would have blown up. (Laugh) They'd have said, why didn't you do something? So anyway.

02:11:17:08

A:

But Gene was ah, I don't know whatever happened to Gene. I know Ev Henry's still there. He was still there. So, Ev Henry sort of took over, there was always a, since Gene and Ev were sort of ah, in

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

competition all the time. I think they both came in about the same time. Ah. There was always head-to-head battles as to who's going to run the, who's going to run the sample lab after Ernie Adkins. Good old, good old boy from Kentucky.

02:11:45:15

A:

After Ernie Adkins quit or left and I think Gene lost out that's all. 'Course Ernie Adkins, he still believed that, he was a very religious person, sort of one of the fundamentalists. He believed that we never did make it to the moon. We really didn't get there, it was just a, just a Hollywood film and we can, we faked this whole thing. (Laughing) Hey, who am I? I've not been there. I wasn't standing there. Can I argue with the dude? Anyway, Ernie believed that so.

Q:

Wow. Also you mentioned that um, an unauthorized strike at one time. (Response: Yeah) When did that happen?

02:12:30:09

A:

Yeah, the plant did that. They just got fed up and walked out. I'm not sure what it was over; I don't think it was over anything big. Ah, I don't think the company was, the company sure wasn't working the guys I rode the car pool with. It sure wasn't working those guys overtime. I mean, wasn't working them overly hard, if, if the stories they were telling me were true.

A:

How they got by with reading a book behind the reactor or whatever they were sitting back there doing. Ah, so nobody was working them. But they just all of a sudden walked out one afternoon. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon, out they went. And ah, it made the news and all. I don't know how long it lasted, probably about 3 - 4 days maybe. Could have lasted longer, I don't recall.

02:13:24:07

A:

But ah, we had no samples during that time. We had plenty of other things to do, a lot of things to catch up on. There was still things from the Pilot Plant I believe. I don't think Pilot Plant people walked out. I don't remember, really. But we did have an authorized, unauthorized strike. And they will fire you, you know the big back and forth between union and the company. They finally got it settled. I don't recall what the settlement was, but ah (Response: Wow) that was an exciting time.

02:13:52:11

Q:

Um, generally how do you feel about having worked at Fernald?

A:

Well, if I had not worked at Fernald, I probably wouldn't be ah, probably would not have gotten a job at P&G's. Which was a much, much better job, cause I was in basic research. And, well at the

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

beginning I was in the, I was in the ah, what would you call it, process control labs sort of. Ah, it was all still basic research, I mean we were working on things that were 10 years down the road so.

02:14:34:11

A:

And then I found a real interesting instrumentation, actually I found the inters - instrum, interesting instrumentation over at Fernald. I had done some work with the guy next to me; gee, I can't think of his name. Anyway, nice guy, and he would show me what was going on with these instruments, and I really found it fascinating so I sort of got interested in ah, instrumentation there. And then when I had an opportunity at P&G to get into instrumentation, I jumped into gas chromatography lab, and then went into the mass spectrography lab so I could combine a gas chromatography with a mass spectrometer and then it mushroomed from there.

02:15:11:26

A:

So, well, mushroomed anyway, (Laughing) I enjoyed my job a whole lot more. And at that time at P&G because of the instrumentation background I had at Fernald. So ah, overall ah, it was ah, overall it was a nice stint. Nice people, ah played ball together, drank a lot of beer together and ah, ah just have, I still have good memories of everyone. I don't recall anybody that I really didn't, don't recall anybody I really didn't like. (Response: Great) Yeah, so it was a good time.

02:15:55:18

Q:

Did ah, now you live pretty close still to the vicinity of the plant (Response: Sure) and ah when all this stuff started hitting the media around 1989 about the dust collector leak out at Plant 9 and all that kind of stuff, how did you react to that? When all that hit the news?

A:

(Laughing) Big whoopie. Surprise, surprise. (Laughing) I mean, I had, you know if, when you experience people throwing it into the hallway, and having glass breaking and UO₂ all over the floor and UO₃ jars broken out in the grass and they pick up the glass and leave the UO₃ laying there you know. Ah Plant 8 fires, fire alarms going off all the time.

02:16:39:07

A:

Safety, no, no consideration whatsoever, not even the safety of the employees, it's no wonder that they weren't considerate about the safety of the neighbors, I mean you know. So, so we ah, so it was no surprise to me at all and it just brought back the memories of all the things that, there were many of the things that ah, that had occurred.

02:17:00:24

Q:

How did you feel about the public outrage at that time?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:

The only public outrage that I'm really aware of, is from Lisa Crawford and the people from the city of Fernald, city, people in Fernald and the people in Ross. And I believe that they, they should be outraged. Ah, if, if they'd been having problems with their children being sicker than usual or, or babies being born prematurely or not so well, and finding uranium in their or radioactivity in their well water and stuff like that.

02:17:42:16

A:

I would have been outraged too. Yeah, I would have been very angry. However, you know a lot of guys went to P&G, Miami Valley. And ah, they didn't seem to think it was a big deal. Had one guy lives up on Paddy's Run I think it was, he said "I don't care, you know, I can drink that stuff. It don't bother me", you know. With that kind of attitude (laughing) ah, I don't know if he was still trying to protect Fernald or if he was just stupid. Anyway.

02:18:15:18

A:

Ah, so anyway I think it was well deserved I believe that, and it was again the times ah nobody cared. But the people in Ross benefitted quite a bit from the, from the plant being there. It appears as so. I mean some of the houses were, they built up around the plant and stuff like that. Ah. Not knowing that this, that these things were going on and what have you. So.

Q:

How do you feel personally, about ah, the pollution of the land that's had to, well the pollution that the plant made there in that area?

02:18:58:26

A:

It appalls me right now and because of the, ah because of the things that, that may not be able to be corrected. And it's just a minor thing, that's, that's just the point. Fernald is just a, just small potatoes compared to what some of these Army bases, I think are doing and from what I'm hearing.

02:19:20:07

A:

Ah, where the pollution is just rampant and maybe not, all radioactive. I get the feeling with the little bit of, except for K-65 which might be a real problem and some of the higher enrichments ah, the ah. But those can be special cases, and I think they can take care of those and maybe shipped them out, but as far as the grounds are concerned, if they can keep it out of the aquifer ah, I think they might be able to ah, to save the area.

02:19:48:07

A:

So at least, that, that in the future perhaps the grass that grows or the trees that grow there will not be distorted or the game or the ah, varmints can use the grounds as their home base and live there and,

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

and in that respect, maybe it isn't a bad thing.

02:20:13:15

A:

Because there's a lot of acreage there that the developers won't be able to develop. And ah, cause they'll have to tell em, yeah you'll be sitting on this atomic pile, radon exuding through the, perhaps radon exuding through the soil into your basement, into your lungs. Ah, so they won't be able to, so we can save at least that much land.

02:20:37:18

Q:

What would you like to see happen...

(Interference from a plane flying overhead.)

02:20:19:21

Q:

Um, yeah, first of all lets cover the, what you mentioned to me about the incident in Plant 7.

A:

Yeah, just a fellow ah, I'm not even sure what they did in Plant 7, ah, it was another, I think, I thought it was another part of green salt. Sometimes we would get green salt from Plant 7, but ah, apparently they had lot of sodium hydroxide there too, 40% which is, is as concentrated as you can make it, sodium hydroxide and water.

02:21:15:14

A:

And it ah, he had a large spill, spilled right on top of the poor dude, and ah, he lost his hair, and I can recall the, someone saying that ah, the nurse had to come over and tear his clothes off and bathe him in water, and water, and water and water, cause the stuff is so oily and so thick you couldn't get it off. There's no way to cut it ah, you couldn't neutralize it with acid so you just had to wash, and wash, and wash, and apparently it was ah, pretty damaging.

02:21:45:23

A:

To the point, well he lived, but I mean to the point that he ah, he had an extremely difficult time, well I mean he still didn't have hair when I left or it came in patches. He had a chunk here, and a chunk there and that kind of stuff. I don't recall his name either but that doesn't. That was another serious incident, and I don't think it was a lack of safety, that was just some kind of, I think. Well obviously it was a lack of something. But ah, I felt for the poor guy.

02:22:15:24

Q:

Lets get back to future land use a little bit. (Response: Sure) What would, what would you like to see

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

happen to the land that Fernald is sitting on right now?

A:

From what I'm gathering, they're trying to turn it into some kind of park or ah, for well, you've got trails and then things of that sort. I think that's a wonderful idea, you know. Ah, I tended a seminar on violence one time, anyway, the lady up there was talking about how we kill people and then build monuments to them, you know.

02:22:57:17

A:

We destroy people, like they're doing out in Littleton right now, you know, these 15 kids. Now they're going to build a monument around this, this entire situation so, so ah its sort of what we're doing to the land out there at Fernald. We sort of destroyed it, we just you know, it's unusable, now we're going to build a monument too it. And I think that's, I think that's a good thing, good thing for ah, for Fernald. I think maybe it will come out as, as, some where along the line as, as an example of what, what can be done.

02:23:32:04

A:

And ah. If we can keep the history going, and, and show how, how it happened, then maybe we won't repeat it. That cliché, you know. Ah, repeating history again. So yes, I think if it can be turned into, turn into usable park land or, or historic site that would be wonderful. That would be wonderful.

02:24:00:17

Q:

One of the terms that has been sort of bandied around and on site a couple of times, especially pertaining to people who worked at Fernald for long period of time, or who worked at Fernald during the Cold War is the "Cold War Warriors," (Response: Huh) I guess you would be considered a "Cold War Warrior," how do you feel about that?

02:24:19:02

A:

Ah, we had our, I guess we had our a, what would cha call it, what do you call when you, when a air raid sirens, or the ah, its something else. What am I trying to say, the ah evacuation drills, and atomic bomb drills etcetera, etcetera. Ah, yeah, well that was back when I was a Goldwater Republican, so I worried about a lot of things.

02:24:52:05

A:

Ah, there were a lot of enemies back then, and, and Russia was really the big one and ah, commies were everywhere, and all this kind of stuff. So, ah, so that the Cold War Warriors, I guess I was certainly one of 'em. And we all feed on one another, all the boys (laughing) the Bill Jessup's, the Jim Pope's, the, ah people like me, and ah, sure, the Dick Kesterburger's, all us guys, ah you know the

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

guys, the country boys, and stuff like that.

02:25:29:07

A:

They were all worried about that. And it was not a very liberal group out there. And I was part of it, but ah, ah, anyway I was one of the warriors. Yeah. And I read up on all this kind of stuff. And read all the books. Ah, I was a communist for the FBI and all that kind of stuff.

02:25:50:18

A:

And would write to the, to the government publishing house and find all these things on how bad Kennedy is and, and how bad those dirty liberals are, (laugh) they didn't call 'em liberals back then, but ah anyway, ah pinkos or whatever we would have thought they were, civil rights activist.

02:26:20:08

A:

Martin Luther King's, all of em, pretty nasty people. That's what we thought anyway. That's what we convinced ourselves of at least. But then ah, again I'll, I'll say it again, I'm glad I've changed.

Q:

That's interesting. Yeah, um, gosh, what was that question that I was gonna ask you. Um.

02:26:46:28

A:

I can tell you a funny little story if you want me to.

Q:

Ok. Yeah.

A:

Well, I mean ah, I don't know even, I'll use his name hell he won't know the difference. John Steckle, I believe it was John anyway. There was ah, he was in the refinery lab, I found this humorous. He was in the refinery lab and we would ah, we would have little 25 milliliter vol flask, volumetric flask, and we'd fill 'em up to the line.

02:27:15:16

A:

We'd pipe head 2 milliliters of, of the UNH in there or whatever it is and fill it up to the line with water and shake and stuff like that. There's a lab across the hall, this girl's sittin' over there, her legs crossed, short skirt on. He's looking at her, filling up this flask, so help me God, (laughing) the water's running down the flask and dripping off his elbow (laughing) he had filled it that many times. (laughing)

02:27:41:04

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:

Any way, you like that? (Laughing) So I called him on it, and then he seemed to realize what was happening, (laughing) and pipe headed a different sample, however, or I don't think he used that same sample. But I thought that was funny. But ah.

Q:

That's great. (Laughing) Gosh, ah,

02:28:02:12

A:

But it was a humorous site to see him standing there, you know, just kind of gawking and water dripping off his elbow, you know, cause you don't see that often.

Q:

(laughing) Um, how do you feel about the work that's going on at Fernald now; the clean up? I'm gonna ask you that question again.

02:28:20:15

A:

Ok, now.

Q:

Hm-hm.

A:

First of all, I think they're getting a bad deal from the *Enquirer*. I think, I've read a lot of that stuff that Gallagher was talking about it's, it's drivel. I mean there's just nothing there. I mean, they're talking about trying to suck something out of nothing. (Laughing) I mean, they're looking for these little petty things to, to ah to get on, was it Fluor Daniel's, were they there when the *Enquirer* was trying? It seems like it's changed somewhere along the line, I don't recall.

02:28:49:02

A:

Ah, I think they're doing a fine job, you know, and ah, you're doing it as good as you can. What the hell, nobody knows anything about this right? Does anybody know anything about vitrification, or I mean, it's all new and for someone to sit back, and that's typical of a conservative paper like the *Enquirer*, to sit back and nit-pick at someone who's trying something new. You know, ah, you know, anything, anything new is a just, just a, is just a enigma to 'em, an anomaly to these people, and I don't know what you do.

02:29:23:07

A:

Anyway I think they're, to the best of my knowledge, they're doing a fine job. I actually, I wanted to go out there and go through a tour, but I didn't, I didn't make it that day. Ah, doing the best you can.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

And if it, if it means a 10 percent increase in whatever it takes to do it, I guess we'll have to do that. We have to pay the price for our mistakes, and we're gonna have to go that in the future too, hopefully we'll learn not to make quite so many from now on. So...

02:29:48:23

Q:

Great, great.

A:

That's all I can think of. Ah. What else could be, what else would be of interest to you?

Q:

I guess I don't know. This is nat sound.