

## **NOTICE**

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**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**

**Transcript**

Name: Bernice Schwing

Date Interviewed: 5/11/99

Date Transcribed: 6/25/99

Tape: #18

Project Number 20012

**Tape FLHP0037**

12:01:10

Q:

The first questions is really easy. I just need to know your name and then spell the last name for me just so we know we have it right. Any time you're ready.

A:

I'm ready, oh, you mean me. OK.

Q:

And you can just talk to me. So, Schwing, how do you spell Schwing?

A:

S-C-H-W-I-N-G.

12:01:37

Q:

OK. Good. I just wanted to make sure we had that right. OK, we're going to start with just a little bit early background and uh, first thing I want to know is where exactly were you born?

A:

In Illinois. A little town called Albion.

12:01:53

Q:

Great. And uh, you have family in that area?

A:

There are still some of them. Very few.

Q:

And how about in the Fernald area, are there some folks here?

A:

Not here now. My aunt lived off of Paddy Run and my grandparents lived in New Haven in that house that they fixed, are fixing up.

12:02:20

Q:

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Great. And uh did you have any sisters and brothers?

A:

Uh, I had one sister and two brothers, I'm the youngest.

Q:

And what were their names?

A:

Byron and Royal. They're both dead now.

12:02:35

Q:

Uh, tell me a little bit about your parents. When you were a child what did they do for a living?

A:

Uh, my dad was kind of superintendent of schools of Edwards County which is the county that Albion is in. And my mother was a housewife.

12:02:50

Q:

Tell me about your childhood in Illinois. What was it like?

A:

Well, I walked about 4 blocks to the grade school but the high school was on the other end and had to walk about a mile and come home for dinner and go back. It was a small town. We had a theater, county seat, bandstand.

12:03:24

Q:

What did you do for fun?

A:

Uh, I was always outside when I was smaller but oh, we went to the picture show on Saturday night. I had a close friend, girlfriend. We always chatted.

12:03:44

Q:

Are you still in touch with her?

A:

She died.

12:03:50

Q:

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And uh, what was the area like when you lived in Illinois?

A:

Um, I lived in a real small town and all around that was farms. And uh, let's see.

12:04:09

Q:

And uh, where did you attend school?

A:

Albion. Albion grade school and Albion High School.

Q:

And what were your classes like?

A:

Uh, like, well I don't think we had as hard of subjects as you folks have here, but we had English and the same difference. Algebra and Chemistry and all that, I didn't take.

12:04:35

Q:

And uh do you have any special childhood remembrances, anything you remember that happened when you were a child at school, or any stories you can tell us?

A:

Well, my dad being County Superintendent of Schools, he would come and visit once a year or twice a year, he made the rounds. I was always afraid I'd make a boo-boo or my grades wasn't good enough or saw my teacher and all this.

12:05:05

Q:

That must have been hard for your dad?

A:

It was.

Q:

OK, now how did you meet your husband?

A:

Uh, on a blind date. Um, I worked with Florence Flemin and uh, at the Methodist Home and um, Fourth of July was coming up and she asked, she drove up and asked Bob if he wanted a date so then we started the Fourth of July.

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12:05:38

Q:

So you were already in the area when you met Bob?

A:

Beg your pardon?

Q:

You were already in the area when you met Bob?

A:

Yes, uh huh.

12:05:43

Q:

So how did you come to this area, did you move with your family or?

A:

Oh, my aunt got me the job with the Methodist Home. That was such a small town that she wanted me to, and she lived in Cincinnati and she kind of thought I should get out of the little town.

12:06:01

Q:

Great. And uh, when did you move to this area then? About what year was that?

A:

1945.

Q:

OK. And uh, when did you get married?

A:

Uh, June of '45 but uh, let's see, well shoot.

Q:

Did you want me to reask the question?

A:

Yeah, the first one.

12:06:31

Q:

OK. About meeting your husband or when you came to town? Where did you live when you first moved here?

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A:

In the house next to Carson's mill down here. Bob just had to walk across over to where he worked.

12:07:00

Q:

Great. So did you live right in the village of Fernald then?

A:

Yes. Uh-huh.

Q:

OK. Tell us about your early married life. What was it like when you first moved here and you first got married?

A:

Well it was kind of easy for me to buy groceries because we just went to the little store across the way. And I could see what was going on with Carson's all the time. There was an awful lot of activity back and forth. Cars coming in, trucks coming in and things like that.

12:07:36

Q:

Great. Um, so in the village of Fernald, what other things were there? I mean, there was a grocery store what else?

A:

Just a grocery store is all. And Carson's.

12:07:55

Q:

So that's all that was in the town?

A:

That's all.

Q:

So when the government came in and bought the land up to start building what they eventually called the Atomic Plant at Fernald, how did that change the town here?

A:

Well really I don't think people realized, even the word atomic, I don't think it meant any danger or any that was coming.

12:08:24

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Q:

And how did that change the community as far as uh traffic and busyness and those kinds of things?

A:

We had an awful lot of traffic here but I don't know what it did for Fernald itself.

12:08:50

Q:

OK. What was it like living so close to the plant? Do you remember when they built it?

A:

Uh yes, cause I could see from my kitchen window. But then, I don't know, I guess I was too naive or something I didn't realize you know the danger part of it.

12:09:10

Q:

What could you see from your window?

A:

Well, most all of it going up. And the smoke and things like that. Even when they got rid of the smoke. I could see that over there.

12:09:30

Q:

Were you able to see workers going in and out and those kinds of things?

A:

No, 'cause I don't drive. So I, mostly to Harrison rather than that way.

Q:

Did you know anybody that worked at the plant?

A:

Yes, but I. Well right now the names I can't.

12:10:07

Q:

Well that's OK, names aren't important. The folks that you've talked to that you knew from the plant, did they talk to you much about what they did?

A:

No. You didn't know anything what they did.

Q:

Did you ever ask?

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A:

Well, I don't know. I guess I knew that it was that way so I just never bothered to ask.

12:10:29

Q:

OK Good. Tell us a little bit about, now how long did you live in the town of Fernald? When did you leave the town of Fernald and move?

A:

About 2 years, 2 and a half years.

Q:

OK. So you were there for most of the building of the plant.

A:

I imagine so, yeah.

12:10:51

Q:

OK. So once it got under way with the process did you move shortly after that?

A:

Meanwhile Bob had had this house built and uh.

Q:

So that's when you moved out of the town of Fernald?

A:

Yeah, that's when we moved out of Fernald.

12:11:18

Q:

OK. Great. Um, so you were living here like um, all during the process years and those kinds of things. In the middle '80's, do you remember hearing about, there was a lot of media about Fernald in the area, you know there was a dust collector leak out at Plant 9 and those types of things and uh, do you remember that period of time, right before they shut the plant down.

A:

No I don't because time just goes on you know, you didn't pay that much attention to it cause, you didn't anyway. There wasn't any reason.

12:11:56

Q:

Why was that?



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A:

I guess I wasn't interested enough. I mean, to me I knew that they were what they were doing by that time and I'm, you know didn't really pay that much attention. I heard it of course, but I mean it didn't bother me any.

12:12:24

Q:

Good. Tell us about your children a little bit.

A:

Um, our daughter Linda was born when we were down at Fernald, she was about 2. And our daughter Cathy uh was born after we were here. And they had a regular childhood.

12:12:51

Q:

Did they ever ask you any questions about the plant? Did they ever want to know what it was?

A:

Not that I know of.

Q:

OK. Good.

A:

Our daughter Linda was, I think I told you over the phone, died of cancer but we never, I know, you know we never put, you can't put a blame when you aren't sure.

12:13:17

Q:

Did you think it might have something to do with Fernald?

A:

No. That never entered our mind.

Q:

OK. And uh, when your children were little, um, what purpose did you and your family think the plant served?

A:

Well they made, it made atomic energy, that's all.

12:13:46

Q:

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OK, good. How do you feel, do you know much about the work that's going on right now, they're cleaning up the plant?

A:

I know that a lot of the buildings had gone down and I don't know whether everything is has been removed that can be removed. I know they are getting closer.

12:14:09

Q:

And being sort of a resident here in the area, how do you feel about the cleanup?

A:

Well it had to be done and I'm glad it's done but as far as what they do with it I'm not sure I even know or even that interested because there again I don't know what they should do with it.

12:14:40

Q:

Now, once that uh, once that land is cleared again, they have been talking about what to do with it. What do you think they should do with the land that Fernald sits on now?

A:

That's what I just now said, I don't really know and I, I'm not afraid, I think it will be safe and all that I mean I have no fear of the land but as far as what happens to it just as long as something nice happens to it.

12:15:14

Q:

They've been talking about building a museum there and uh, putting in you know some, they're actually talking about doing a lot of stuff with sort of the pre-history of Fernald, putting in a lot of Indian artifacts and those types of things about the area and then just about the early settlements, and then of course the history of the plant. How do you feel about some type of museum going in there?

A:

That would, I think would be nice because I know a lot of Bob's people around here that did farm picked up a lot of arrowheads around here.

12:15:55

Q:

Yeah, there's a lot of history in this area. I think that would be very cool. OK. Is there anything you'd like to add?

A:

No.

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Q:

Great, you did great.

A:

Can you edit out part of that? You will won't you?

Q:

Well, that's not, I mean, hang on we're going to go ahead and roll of just a little bit of silence here just so we can get the tone of the area so. OK and this is nat sound.