

## **NOTICE**

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**FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT**

**Transcript**

Name: Joe Conrad

Date Interviewed: 5/11/99

Date Transcribed: 6/27/99

Tape: #20

Project Number 20012

**Tape FLHP0040**

15:01:10

Q:

OK. First thing is, if you could just give us your name and spell it?

A:

Joseph Conrad. J-O-S-E-P-H C-O-N-R-A-D.

15:01:18

Q:

Great. And uh, first of all, let's start with a little background. Um, how long have you been in the area, uh, where did you go to school, those kinds of things.

A:

Um, I have been physically living in the area since 1987. I moved my business into Ross in 1985. Um, I've worked in the area probably most of my life. My uncle has a dairy farm in this general area and I've always stopped and helped him on his farm. I've worked on his farm.

15:01:55

Q:

Great. And uh, where did you go to school?

A:

Um, went to Hayes Elementary School which is located up in Hamilton from there we went to St. Anne's which is up in Hamilton then I went to Baden for high school. Graduated in 1980.

15:02:10

Q:

Great. And uh, you mentioned to me about your grandfather's farm and it was actually part of Fernald at one time?

A:

Correct. Um, my parents told me plus you know relatives told me that our grandfather farmed Fernald before the plant actually moved in. That uh, his main farm was down on Hanley Road in Cincinnati and they would just truck everything up here and farm the land up here. Up until the time they built the plant.

15:02:42

Q:

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Did he have any buildings at that area at all?

A:

Not that I know of. You know, I just knew he farmed it. I didn't know how he farmed it or anything else, I just know he farmed it.

15:02:54

Q:

And you mentioned your uncle's farm, is that near Fernald?

A:

It's approximately 2 miles west of the plant. Um, on New Haven Road.

15:03:07

Q:

And what did you do there when you were working on?

A:

Just ----- chores or whatever, I mean, milk cows, you know, feed the cows or whatever. Just helped in general, general help. Um, in the summer time we'd bale a lot of hay, bale the straw. Um, during this time like right now, I'd be planting, doing, you know disking you know. Get a tractor and do some disking and that.

15:03:42

Q:

So while you were working at your uncle's farm obviously was really close to Fernald, um, how much did you know about Fernald at the time?

A:

We always used to know it was the atomic plant and you know they made something for bombs you know. Um, that's about we knew. We knew you never went on the property because they had that big guard tower on top of that one big building and they could see all around. If you came on the property, they'd come and see what you wanted.

15:04:10

Um, one particular time we pulled in, I was with a friend, pulled in to feed some cows, they actually came out. He told me they always come out everyday, even though they know it's him, they come out and just you know, what are you here for. You know and they knew he was there to feed the cows anyway.

15:04:28

Q:

And what did your family tell you about Fernald?

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A:

Just it was the atomic plant. That was about it. You knew nothing, they never elaborated on it or anything else.

15:04:42

Q:

How about in school? What did they talk about in school about the plant?

A:

In our, in high school in History classes, um, when they talked about you know getting bombed they said we would be a major target simply because #1 Fernald, #2 General Electric and #3 Wright-Pat so we would probably be one of the major targets in this area and uh.

(Child in the camera view)

15:05:22

Q:

OK. We'll ask that question again. Um, can you tell me what they told you in school about the plant?

A:

In high school we discussed a lot, er, the discussion was you know we would be a major target. This area would be because of the Fernald plant because it made feed material for bombs. Also because of General Electric airplane engines and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. So they just said this place would be completely eliminated as you would say.

15:05:52

Q:

So how did you react to that as a high school student?

A:

Not, didn't bother me at all. You know what I'm saying, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen, you can't stop it, there ain't nothing you can do about it.

15:06:14

Q:

Um, let's see. Um, did you any of the plant workers?

A:

Um, to my recollection, the only plant worker that I really knew was Mr. Davis. He was a policyholder that I wrote up in probably 1986 or 1985 and right after that he passed away. He was all ate up with cancer which he could of caught out there or whatever you know.

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15:06:45

Q:

And he was in the medical monitoring program?

A:

I don't know. I just know he worked at Fernald most of his life and uh, you know, he died from cancer.

15:07:00

Q:

And as his insurance agent, did you try to get any type of information from Fernald?

A:

No. Um, I just deal, I dealt with him strictly in property and casualty, no life and health. So that had nothing to do with that. Another particular person that I did um write life insurance on and health insurance on, we needed their medical records and we requested their medical records from Fernald and I went down to Mercy South where they were stored and they told me it was classified government information and I couldn't get a copy of it at that time. So we just, sent somebody out and did our own physical.

15:07:44

Q:

Um, what did, especially like maybe junior high, high school kind of years, when you were doing some work seasonally at your uncle's farm, was that about the time you were doing that?

A:

Well I did that up until, um probably about 1985, '86 then from then on it's been Saturdays here and there. I still do it now.

Q:

And what's your uncle's name?

A:

Joseph Burwinkle.

15:08:16

Q:

OK. And uh, while you were doing that type of work close to Fernald, um, what did you and your friends think the purpose of the plant was?

A:

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Making material for bombs. You know, we pretty well you know knew what it was.

15:08:34

Q:

And how did you know that?

A:

It's just what we was always told you know. We knew it wasn't the Ralston Purina plant which they projected theirself to be by painting their water towers red and white and putting feed material operations on their signs. You know, we knew it was an atomic plant. Simply because a feed material plant, or a Ralston Purina plant is not going to have guards running around with guns.

15:08:59

You know, but we always heard it was you know feed materials to make bombs and process uranium. Plus I guess some of my relatives knew people that worked in there also. You know there's a lot of people in this area that did work in the plant.

15:09:17

Q:

And uh, as far as your grandfather's farm, how did your family react to the news that it was, I mean I don't know when you found out, when, did he lose his farm to eminent domain?

A:

He did. He rented the land, he never owned the land and he just farmed it but when they came in and basically took over, I mean that put, that took that many acres away from him. He only had maybe 10 or 15 acres down on Hanley Road so basically they had to buy another farm which they bought one out on New Haven Road. And for a man that was like 50 something years old, going into major debt, that was a major concern and I think it was about 6 years after he moved on New Haven Road he died of ulcers, you know, I guess it just worried him to death.

15:10:16

Q:

And um, what kind of myths or legends did you hear about the plant?

A:

Nothing really. I mean, I've already heard that somebody shot a deer and they thought it come off of that land. It had like a white liver and stuff like that. I mean, some of the animals are deformed and where they dump into the river down here, some of the fish are deformed and stuff like that. That's about it.

15:10:44

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Q:

How about the silos? Have you heard any myths or legends about the silos?

A:

Um, I've heard there's like gold, gold down in the silos, or silver, but it's such hot material down there they don't even try to get it out.

15:11:02

Q:

And uh, have you ever been actually on the Fernald site?

A:

Yes. Um, probably back in 1980, 1981, I did go place a job application there trying to get a job there. But at that time there was a hiring freeze. So I didn't get a job, to my luck I guess you would say.

15:11:25

Q:

How about tours? Have you ever taken a tour of the plant?

A:

1986 or '87 I guess it was when they changed the name from either Fernald to Westinghouse or Westinghouse to Fluor Daniel, um, I was invited for a name change where they changed the signs and all that. At that time they took me, took us a tour and showed us like the K-65 silos and stuff like that. It was all completely enclosed bus, air conditioned bus, you were not allowed going outside. Then after the tour you had to stick your hands into a machine where they, I guess they see if you got contaminated or not.

15:12:08

Q:

And what was your impression of all of that, while you were on site?

A:

It was neat. It was different. It looked like there was a lot of stuff there they waste, you know, but that's typical government. So, but you know, it was different. Um, I was impressed by the, like a hospital they had there. I mean, they had everything there. Complete with doctor, birthing facility you know whatever, they said they could do everything right there. Plus, with their fire equipment, ambulance, I mean, you know they had a pretty good set up as you can say.

15:12:46

Q:

That's neat. Uh, so how in your estimation, how is Fernald affected your family's life?

A:

My family, my personal family, it hasn't affected me any. You know maybe my grandparents and

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maybe my parents you know simply having to relocate up here and to Butler County where they was down on Hanley Road. Um, they grew up in the same James Church. You know, we went out here to St. Aloysious Church, I mean, they left a lot of family I believe down there on Hanley Road.

15:13:25

Q:

So that was your parents?

A:

Yes. You know but that's again their opinion or you know, I guess I'm just speculating for them I guess you would say.

15:13:36

Q:

OK good. And uh, what are your impressions right now of the cleanup at Fernald?

A:

I have no impressions. I mean, just get it done, if you made a mistake, clean it up.

15:13:52

Q:

Do you know much about what's happening actually on site, or what they're doing with the waste or?

A:

Not too much. Um, I know they did break the seals on the silo, I guess they're trying to start pumping that out, they're extracting. I know they are pumping the water from underneath and putting it through a filtration system and pumping it back in to clean up the aquifer. Um, you know, that's about all I know.

15:14:19

Q:

How involved are you with the sort of Fernald outreach programs like with the public meetings and those kinds of things?

A:

Not involved at all. I've never been to one.

15:14:32

Q:

How do you find out your information about Fernald?

A:

Um, just hearsay, what people tell me. I have several of the employees on site insured and uh every once in a while they'll stop in and I ask them a question or two. Such as the other day, an employee stopped in, I asked him if he saw the newspaper thing cause I knew he's in charge, or he's one of the



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people that work with transporting the material through the railroad crossing. And like I said, they're fighting about the railroad crossing up there. He never was aware of that. So I gave him the article and I guess he helped get it corrected. You know, but it's just what people tell me. You know.

15:15:15

Q:

So your client base?

A:

Client base. Uh-huh.

15:15:23

Q:

Um, can you tell us a little bit about when you were first married and the house that you lived in when you were first married?

A:

We were first married, we moved out on a farm on New Haven Road. The house sat up on top of a hill, you could actually oversee, um, the Fernald plant. Just the tops of the buildings and uh, the um, water towers and at night it would just glow from all the lights on the fences I guess and everything just lighting the plant up. But um, you know we could see all that. It was probably a mile and a half, two miles away. You know, but you could just, you could see the glow over there. And it wasn't from uranium like everybody says.

15:16:13

Q:

While you were living in that house, um, did you watch a lot of activity going on on site?

A:

You couldn't see that close. You could just see the buildings and stuff like that but you couldn't actually see people or anything.

15:16:25

Q:

Wow. Um, around the mid '80's of course a lot of um news I guess came out about Fernald and how it had done some pollution to the environment. There was a dust collector leak in Plant 9 and uh, how did you react to that particular event?

A:

Um, I didn't react to it at all. I mean, it never bothered me or affected me or anything else. I just thought at the time, if somebody intentionally knew that dust collector was leaking and let it leak, then they should be punished because they basically as you would say harmed the environment.

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15:17:05

Q:

And uh, how do you feel about the safety of your family, living so close to Fernald?

A:

The way I look at it, if I'm contaminated, I'm already contaminated so there's nothing I can do about it now. What's done is done. Um, I talked to, uh, couple engineers that I had insured and stuff like that, and they told me that actually the dust that did leak out of the dust collector probably never made it past their fence. It never made it up this far. And the only thing that is contaminated is what's there on their property. So just stay off their property.

15:17:51

Q:

And uh, let's see. How um, what would you like to see happen with the land that your grandfather used to farm, now Fernald, what would you like to see happen with that land once the?

A:

I really don't know. Um, I understand it will never be put back in farming. Um, I've heard already talk about light industry. Somebody told me they're going to build a park there which you know if it's, why build a park there if some of the ground is still contaminated or even as they say a low, moderate or safe level. And plus, they have the containment cell there that they're building. Um, really I don't know. I don't know what they should do with that property. You know.

15:18:42

Q:

They're talking about putting a museum in there. What do you think of that?

A:

Why? You know, why do you need a museum? Just to show what it was and that?

Q:

Mainly they want to, actually it's going to be more than just a museum about Fernald. It's also going to be a museum that illustrates the prehistory of Fernald so even, we've found a lot of artifacts there, so like Indian artifacts so those types of things would go in the museum along with a lot of the Crosby Township early settlement type history type stuff. We have lots of pictures of people standing in front of log cabins that just first moved into the area.

15:19:22

And it was an isolated and remote area for a long time and since it, there is a lot of interesting history here. And then of course chronicling the Fernald plant, we have tons of photos and stuff like that. Then what did it do, why was it here, those kinds of things and then the actual cleanup and tear down of the plant too, so how would you feel about a museum like that in the area?

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15:19:46

A:

It wouldn't bother me. I mean, you know if that's what they want to build then build it. You know, I just, I don't go for a lot of stuff like that.

15:19:58

Q:

Do your kids ever ask you about the plant when you drive by?

A:

Not really. Not too much.

15:20:04

Q:

And when they do ask, what do you tell them it is?

A:

The old atomic plant you know. That's, you know, they never really inquired too much about it you know.

15:20:20

Q:

Um, since you've been in the area for a while, uh, just the changes that happened at Fernald in the last 20 years or so, how do you think those changes have changed the community itself, the surrounding community?

A:

I haven't really seen too much changes in the community. I know, you know Fernald's shut down and stuff like that um, you know maybe it's put more people at ease about moving into this area. They say that this is going to be the next growth area is Morgan and Ross Township. And maybe people feel more comfortable moving over this way. You know, cause they always said before, Fernald was the biggest, big hindrance, people did not want to live in this area simply because of the plant.

15:21:09

Q:

How has your business done even living in the, sort of the shadow of Fernald?

A:

My business done you know, very well. Um, but I don't strictly concentrate to the Ross you know Morgan Township areas, I have people all over. West Chester, Fairfield, Hamilton. I mean, just, you know, we answer the phone here but I still make house calls so I'll go you know, wherever my appointment is. And uh, you know, a lot of people will still travel out here to drop payments off and stuff like that. That's really never, you know, upset anybody or anything like that.

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15:21:53

Q:

Good, good. And uh, since, since your sort of living here in this area during the Cold War, um, in relation to Fernald, what is your sense of patriotism?

A:

What?

Q:

Do you know what I mean? Fernald was doing something for the Department of Defense for the Cold War um, what was your reaction to that, I mean, was it something necessary?

A:

No, it didn't phase me at all you know. It was nothing, you know, nothing that I recollect as you would say.

15:22:37

Q:

OK. Good. Let me check in my notes here real quick see if we covered everything. Got that, got that. Oh, I know what I wanted to ask you, there was one thing I wanted to ask you. Um, during the time that they were sending out a lot of notices about the medical monitoring, um, you were considered for medical monitoring, or you wanted medical monitoring?

15:23:15

A:

Um, I sent my notice in to, for medical monitoring but they denied me on the basis, because they said I was just seasonal help on the farm. Um, my contention was I would go there on a Friday night or Saturday morning and not go home until Sunday night so technically speaking I spent about a total of 40 hours out there. But they denied because they just said you're seasonal help. It wasn't, I was drawing a paycheck from them every week even though I did go there every week.

15:23:50

Q:

And uh, how about the actual claims settlements for the class action suits? Were you involved in that at all?

A:

None. None at all.

15:23:57

Q:

How about any of your family?

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A:

My mother. My mother was and my uncle and his sons were.

12:24:05

Q:

Can you tell me a little bit about how that whole process happened?

A:

What's that?

Q:

Their, their claim settlements?

A:

I don't, they just filled some papers out and sent them in. That's, that's all I knew. You know, I never asked them how much they got or anything else. I think my uncle got a substantial amount from them because he was a major land owner out there. Um, but I never did hear what the figures were. And I never asked, it was none of my business.

15:24:33

Q:

And let's see. On your uncle's farm, did Fernald ever come and do soil samples or water samples or anything?

A:

Um, I think they pulled some soil samples and I do remember my cousin talking about one day when he was disking the helicopters would actually, the helicopter would fly around pull air samples and the helicopter would fly down and fly through his dusk cloud that was coming off of his disk, I guess to pull an air sample or try to pull some kind of you know particles in the air something like that.

15:25:07

They also asked that any animal that he killed, basically he took in to have slaughtered, I think they wanted the liver out of it and maybe the kidneys. And they was doing testing on the animals also, or the animal organs. So any beef that we got taken in or anything like that, they wanted the kidneys and liver out of that.

15:25:28

Q:

Wow. That's interesting. That's the first I heard of that.

A:

Oh yeah?

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Q:

Yeah, that's kind of interesting?

A:

Well, that was Burwinkle's, Knollman's, um, I think Summey's was in on that one. They did that on several farms.

15:25:44

Q:

And how about the water issue? Because since Fernald sits right over a major aquifer, did your uncle ever have any concern about the quality of his water?

A:

No. Um, basically when all that was brought out I think he already had city water put in. You know, so he was feeding all his livestock, or watering all his livestock with city water.

15:26:08

Q:

Was there any reaction to having Fernald so close and like before city water was put in, realizing that he was feeding all his livestock with the water that came from the aquifer?

A:

It was never an issue. I do remember one time when Fernald built their new sirens, the warning systems, and they set that warning system off and it spooked all the cows and I think he lost 1 or 2 cows out of that. And also I think on Don Burger's farm, he lost a cow or two because of them sirens going off.

15:26:38

Q:

And what year was that about?

A:

That was probably '85. '85, '86, somewhere right in there.

15:26:48

Q:

And uh, that makes me think also about the implosions that were done on site. Did your uncle have any feedback about that?

A:

I didn't hear nothing about it.

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Q:

Cause I know that we scared a couple of Knollman's cows I believe. And that was like a major, huge noise and a lot of neighbors heard it. I don't know if you guys would have heard it here, did you hear and of the implosions?

A:

No, even when they blew up the bridge here in Ross, I didn't hear that one either.

15:27:18

Q:

Wow. I guess it's just far enough away that you're not. It's not that far but it's like, probably just far enough away. I think we did all those on Saturday mornings.

A:

Yeah.

Q:

So that's kind of interesting.

A:

You was asking about testing, I do remember where the guys, even when I was growing up, walking across the old green bridge there, in Ross, with their little stainless steel bucket to pull water samples out of that. You always seen them down there.

15:27:50

Q:

From the river?

A:

From the river.

Q:

Which river was that?

A:

Great Miami. Right there at Cincinnati-Brookville Road. I guess they would pull a sample there and maybe somewhere else they'd pull a sample.

15:28:05

Q:

Wow that's interesting. I always wondered you know how they got around to do all that stuff.

A:

Uh-huh.

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Q:

Ah, let's see. Uh, have you ever heard from any of the neighbors that you may have been friends with, any stories from any of the neighbors, things that may have happened to them?

A:

Not really. No, I've never heard nothing like that.

15:28:37

Q:

OK. Is there any thing you want to add or anything we didn't cover that you want to mention or?

A:

Nothing that I can think of.

Q:

OK. Great. We're just going to get a little bit of nat sound here. This will just take a second. We just have to get room sound. This is nat sound.