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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

Name: Carol Knollman Colegate

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Tape: #39

Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP0082

12:01:03

Q:

Okay. My first question is always the hardest question. We just need to know what your name is and how to spell it.

A:

Okay. Okay. My name is Carol Colegate. First name C-A-R-O-L and last name C-O-L-E-G-A-T-E.

12:01:17

Q:

Great, we're just going to start with a little background. Uh, you lived in the Fernald area all your life, within a 5 miles radius really of the plant, tell us about when you were a child what it was like living on the farm and just a little bit about your family.

12:01:31

A:

Okay. When I was born in 1950 I understand that's when the plant was being built and I lived in my grandpa's house there at um, right straight across from the south access road. And when I was 2-years-old we moved up on to the main farm which was owned by an Earl Simmons. His father who was a doctor, my father had bought that farm from him.

12:01:54

A:

And so I had three brothers, Norm, Phil and Milt and myself and we all moved there and we milked the cows. And as I was little I remember a lot about milking cows and you know being there on the farm. And I lived there on the farm until I was married in 1969 and then from 1969 to 1971 I moved back to my grandpa's farm and lived in a trailer that was um a place where my brother had made.

12:02:20

A:

My brother Milt had also lived in the trailer in that spot. We lived there for 3 years, then we moved up to Layhigh Road and then we lived on George Road for a while now we're back on Morgan-Ross Road. So I've been in this area all my life.

12:02:36

Q:

Uh, what were your impressions of the plant? It was right there, right on the same side of the road and then across the street. What were your impressions as a child? Well, I don't really remember them building it. I remember it being completely finished. And when I was little, I was about 6-years-old, I got a pony, her name was Sugar and I used to ride her all over the place. I would go back in the pasture to get the cows with my dad and I'd ride the pony back. And a dog and my pony

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and we would bring the cows in.

12:03:04

A:

And you know I remember looking at it, then when I got a little older I would go back there. My dad always said don't go under any of the fences, uh, don't you know, if your back there make sure someone knows that you're there. So I would ride my pony up to the barbed wire fences. And lots of times there would be a guard or someone who was back there and he would just come up and talk to me for a little while.

12:03:24

A:

And then I'd be back on my way and you know go back through the woods and stuff. But I used to ride the woods back along Paddy's Run Creek and we'd play in the creek there and I'd stop and tie the pony up. And sometimes I'd take a sandwich along to pretend I was having a picnic or I was a pioneer, an Indian or something.

12:03:42

A:

And you know I played back in there a lot. And then when my friends would come over we would also go back there and play because there were grape vines that we could swing across the valleys with and it was just really a beautiful area. And I always thought oh, when I grow up I'm going to build a house back here because it's so pretty.

12:03:58

A:

And you know we used to imagine there were Indian mounds and all kinds of things. We'd make up stories you know about being back in there. But that was a lot of fun as a kid. I remember that.

12:04:09

Q:

And what did you think the plant was there for?

A:

I really didn't know. When I was in grade school we used to have bomb raids and I went to Crosby School, which I taught at later, my first 3 years of teaching. And we would have these bomb raids and we would go down in like the boiler room of the old Crosby School. And we were all supposed to be quiet and we wondered what this was all about.

12:04:32

A:

And our teachers didn't say much about it so I asked my parents, I said why are we getting bomb raids. They said well we're having a war with Cuba and you know we're worried that we may get bombed because of the plant and I said what does the plant have to do with this.

12:04:47

A:

And the way I understood it, when I was in about 3rd and 4th grade is that um if we were bombed the Fernald plant was one of the top 10 places in the United States that would be bombed. And so that's

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why we had to do the bomb raids. And in our house we had this old cellar and my mother used to can and put green beans and corn and different things down in this old cellar.

12:05:10

A:

And we you know we said this is where we're going to go if we get bombed. But then later on I found out if we were really bombed everything within 20 miles would be annihilated anyway, so we probably wouldn't have a chance. But I used to have nightmares sometimes about the cows and everything getting killed by a bomb.

12:05:27

A:

But I didn't know why they would bomb the plant exactly I just knew they made materials that bombs were made out of. That's what I understood about it when I was a child. And at Crosby School my friends thought the same thing you know. But I also remember that the teachers at school would count the number of kids in our room like the first or second day of school.

12:05:47

A:

She'd have them raise their hand if their parents worked at the Fernald plant. Because the way I understood it, the Fernald plant helped fund activities at our school. They gave extra money so those kids were worth a little extra money or something like that to the school. So they got some extra funding because their parents worked at the Fernald plant.

12:06:09

A:

And I usually had three or four students in my classes going through whose parents did work there. So I remember that from school.

12:06:18

Q:

Yeah, I think that was the Atomic Energy Commission. (Uh-huh) They were doing that for any of the DOE sites, well it wasn't DOE then, it was an AEC site wasn't it?

A:

But see I don't have a lot of historical.

12:06:28

Q:

That's okay. I mean, your personal impressions are what we were really trying to find. (Okay) um, how much contact did you have with plant workers?

A:

Well, like I told her in the first interview, the workers, the, there was a guard, always a security guard who would go around the fences, the perimeter of the plant, every hour. And that was pretty much of a security thing because they would check to see whether the cows were out or not. And so in the middle of the night if there was a knock on the door we usually figured it was someone from the plant and the cows were out.

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12:07:05

A:

And we'd all get up and we'd put the cows in but not a whole lot of contact other than we used to sell eggs at the farm. And we sold a lot of eggs to the people who worked back at the plant. And so about 4:00 o'clock every day the people from the plant would start coming in and they'd buy eggs. And on our old back porch we would have all the eggs ready.

12:07:27

A:

And we knew by 4:00 o'clock that they needed to be washed and sorted and you know in boxes and ready to sell. And so you know I was young I was like in grade school at the time and so we would go out on the back porch and people would pull in, they'd come in with their badges on. And I always wondered what the badges were for and they told us that they were developed every month to see if they had been exposed to any radiation.

12:07:50

A:

That's why they were so thick. And they had a little thing that would pull out on them. That's the way I understood it. Although I had never seen the insides of one but that's what I told, I was told that that's what those were for. And um, that's uh, there were a few people or kids that I played with whose parents worked back there.

12:08:10

A:

And most of them lived in Ross. And I told you about the part of Ross called Birdland and I understand that was built to accommodate the workers at the plant. They were quick homes that were put up all around the same time. And a lot of those people worked at the plant. And that was in a different school district. That's in the Ross district if you live in Ross.

12:08:30

A:

And the farm, where we were, was in Hamilton County, right at the edge of Butler County. So I would go on a school bus up to Butler County line, come back and some of my friends lived in Ross and they went to a different school. But I knew them through their parents coming to our house and getting eggs and things like that. So you know that's something that I did as a kid. That's really the contact that I had with the workers back there.

12:08:59

Q:

How did any of them, if they did, did they ever try for, explain their jobs at all or talk about it?

A:

No, I think it was very quite. In fact, when my brother Bill was married to Eileen she used to work at the plant. And she started working there when I was probably in 5th or 6th grade. And I would baby-sit for their two children while she worked at the plant. And um, she also wore one of those badges and hardly ever talked about what she did.

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12:09:27

A:

She said she was a secretary. And we just never asked any questions about it. And as far as I remember the workers who came to get eggs, they never said much of what they did back there either. And I wondered you know at a later point in my life if they were told just not really to say too much about it.

12:09:42

A:

We heard there was a lot of secret things going on back there. And so we figured if you worked back there you were supposed the secret, you're not supposed to tell everything that goes on. So we didn't really know too much of what was going on. I mean, that's my impression of it, my father never talked about it much. Um, just wasn't a point of conversation in our family.

12:10:06

A:

And our family was together all the time. I mean, we would eat lunch and dinner you know supper all together right there on the farm.

12:10:16

Q:

So this was all pretty much during the height of the Cold War, and uh, just from your recollection, what was the typical American's mindset regarding the Cold War?

A:

Well, see I was a kid during that time. I was just worried about us being bombed. That's really basically what I worried about. I don't think I understood it at all from an adult point of view at that time. And was just glad that everything blew over and was okay. Um, here recently what worried me a little bit was when the Gulf War was on, they put barricades at all of the exits and entrances down there.

12:10:57

A:

And even my teacher friends who would drive by there every day on their way to work would say wonder why they're putting up those barricades. I wonder if there's something back there that they're worried that someone's going to get into and blow up or you know try to breach security. And I wondered about that too.

12:11:15

A:

I thought that everything was pretty well cleaned up and put away and there was nothing really dangerous that somebody could get into. But that worried me here lately, that seemed to be a necessity to put up barricades and so forth and ask people you know who you are and where are you going, why are you going back here.

12:11:33

A:

My dad always told me that that you would never go back the plant and just drive in to see it. He said

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you always have to go through security whether you go in the south road or the north road the parking lots lead up to a security area and you would have to stop and get out and go in and tell them who you are. So I remember that part too.

12:11:53

Q:

Did you ever find out why they had barricades up?

A:

No, I didn't.

Q:

Would you like to know why?

A:

Yes I would. Yes I would.

12:12:01

Q:

During the Gulf War um they were building um armor for, out of depleted uranium, tanks. It was called the 4-A Project. So that's why. It was just more of a top secret thing than anything. It wasn't really dangerous material, it was just they didn't want anybody to know what they were doing.

A:

Oh, really? Well, thank you.

12:12:25

Q:

Um, why did your father buy the land that he bought?

A:

He bought it because of the great water supply. And um, this is something that he has told everyone. He said when he was shopping for a farm, looking around, he found out that this place had the, a wonderful water supply. Eighty foot down there was supposed to be the aquifer and with dairy cattle drinking a lot of water and trying to keep a dairy clean, where you wash everything all the time, he figured that that water supply was the best around.

12:12:57

A:

And it was better than any other farm that he could find. And I remember as a kid when someone would come to the farm, even our egg customers, he would say, come on out here and have a drink of this water, this is the best water in the country. And we had a spigot that would come up out of the ground about maybe 4-foot, 'cause I would have to stand up on a block to drink from it.

12:13:15

A:

And he would turn that water on and he'd say just let that run a little bit when it gets really cold and he said just taste that, isn't that good. And he would stand there over people as they got a drink. Then he

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would say wasn't that the best water. And you know he was very proud of that. And our dairy farm was rated like the lowest bacteria count for counties around.

12:13:37

A:

But we used a lot of water to clean everything up. And so we had ample water supply for all the cattle and their drinks and also to clean things and keep things clean. And now they're using water down there to irrigate the crops. We didn't do that when I was small. But that water I believe they pull out of the river most often. But you know we had really, really good water down there.

12:13:57

A:

And it was very disheartening to my dad to find out that that water supply was becoming contaminated. But you know he died like 10 years ago but he worried about that. He worried that the water was going to be, become unusable. And I know the people around here worry that the milk, if the cows drank water that was contaminated, that the milk would also be contaminated.

12:14:19

A:

And from everything my brothers ever said with all the tests that the milk went through, they never found anything in it that was any different from any other dairy cows in the whole country. So, but my dad used to laugh and say an old dairy cow, they can process a corn cob you know and you'll never know it. Because they can eat a lot of things and still turn it into milk and you know meat and whatever.

12:14:41

A:

But a few years ago uh, the plant started asking for samples of, of our cattle which concerned me also. They wanted the liver and I forget what other part of the cow they wanted when the cow was slaughtered. And they were testing that to see if anything had been contaminated about that cow. And um, my husband and I at that time lived up on George Road up in Okeana.

12:15:06

A:

Which is probably 6 miles, um, as the crow flies from the plant, and they asked for samples from our farm too. They had picked out like 6 different farms in the area and we weren't notified of that. We took the cows to market and while we were there they told us they had to collect samples from it. And we said why. And they said because we've been notified from the United, let's see, the um, I'm trying to think. United um, not dairy. USDA, Department of Agriculture.

12:15:38

A:

They wanted the samples of those cows. And so the people at the auction barn thought that we weren't getting a fair price for our cattle because they were asking for samples. And anyone who bought that cow knew that they had to render these different parts of the cow back to the USDA for testing. Which was kind of knocked us all off our feet. We were kind of wondering why all that occurred as well.

12:16:04

Q:

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What did they find? Anything?

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A:

We were never told. We were never told a thing. However, in the Harrison Press there was a small article in there that we cut out and um they had, they had told the newspapers that these certain farms had been targeted for meat samples and that it related to the Fernald plant. And we thought that was pretty bad because we sold sides of beef to people and we would raise you know, Angus steers and so forth that we had, had raised.

12:16:36

A:

And we had a lot of customers. And when they read that, all of the sudden the customers kind of diminished you know. They were almost, it was like they were afraid to buy cattle from us anymore because gee there might be something in there that you know they're looking for. And uh, same with milk.

12:16:53

A:

My brother said that there were lots of calls to the different dairys in Cincinnati to find out where our milk was hauled, that they weren't going to buy from those dairys anymore because the milk from Knollman Farm is being shipped there. So that's had an impact on the farm and our life. Those are things we worry about.

12:17:14

Q:

Um, did, did that cause financial difficulties?

A:

Well, yes. Um, for my husband and I, we were selling around 50 or 60 sides of beef every year and within 2 years time, we were down to like ten. And so we were getting a premium price for the ones that we were selling to our individual customers and after that time we would just ship them to market and take whatever market would give us for them.

12:17:39

A:

And then for my brothers, they sold milk to Milk Marketing in Cincinnati and Milk Marketing would call occasionally and tell us that people were, said they were going to boycott or that they were not going to buy milk from that company because that milk from the farm was shipped there and people were afraid that there was something in the milk that was going to hurt them later on.

12:18:00

A:

So, yes it would. Although it was more of a publicity thing I think that hurt us. I mean, people were still really nice to us and everything. It wasn't our fault that all of those things occurred but yet it's been a problem. And I'm still a part owner of the farm with my brothers and in our corporation meetings that we have several times throughout the year, we sit and we talk about that.

12:18:23

A:

We roll out the maps and we look to see where the contamination has spread, just how bad it is and

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how deep it is and you know that's something that really a farmer shouldn't have to worry about I feel.

12:18:37

Q:

Tell us little bit about the difficulties with the water that you had.

12:18:44

A:

Well the way I understood it that the first time that it happened, Lisa Crawford was living in my grandpa's farm. We rented the farmhouse to her. My brothers received a letter from the plant that said that the water had possible uranium in it. That they had found you know a trace of it.

12:19:02

A:

And so my brother shared that letter with Lisa and within just a couple of days all of the news reporters and TV stations was at the house. And I remember going by and um seeing you know the TV cameras and so forth sitting at my grandpa's house. My brothers were very concerned about that because it just seemed like it hit national news so quickly.

12:19:24

A:

And we didn't intend that to happen. We, you know perhaps if you looked back on it you would think of a different way to show her that letter. And we didn't like the fact that she was inviting, you know, Channel 9, Channel 12 news and all these different Newsweek and different people to come in to our property and take pictures of water running out of faucets and so forth and listening to a story that um I'm going to die some day because I'm drinking this water and so forth.

12:19:51

A:

Because we'd lived there all our life and we had a sort of opinion that they were kind of going to take care of us and they were going to do things right and that's why they sent us the letter to let us know. And my brothers now where their homes are built, they have a water line that they've put in and so they have city water now.

12:20:07

A:

Where they used to have well water. And um you know I've heard the stories about how they started out with one filter in the basement filtering the water and Fernald would come and check it every month. And then they put two filters in and they still check it and pretty soon they said don't use this water.

12:20:23

A:

Don't drink it. You can wash your car with it you can wash your clothes with it, all these things, but don't use it to drink. And so now my brothers' homes they have one of those big 5 gallon water containers sitting by the back door and that's the water you drink. And then they have the city water pumped into their house now.

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12:20:40

A:

Which is a real shame because we were in an area where water was a premium, it was a wonderful thing to have unlimited amounts of. So that's been sort of an impact on my family and my life as I've grown up.

12:21:01

Q:

Looking back how do you feel, well mainly from a health point of view, how do you feel knowing that you've been drinking that water for so long?

12:21:06

A:

Well, (laughing) you don't know yet. I'm forty-eight and you know I hope that somewhere down the line that I don't develop cancer that could be treated or, you know, traced back to that. My family have been fairly cancer free, I mean as I look back on my history of the you know ailments that my ancestors had my grandpas and grandmas, it was usually a stroke or heart attack that do us in, in our family.

12:21:33

A:

But I hear about different families like the Butterfields who almost every person in the family has had cancer. And you know I hear other people talk about people who've worked at the plant who died of cancer. So you worry about it. Of course you do, you know. You hope that it never affects you or your children and but how do you know, you just don't know. There's as many things that cause cancer, you know we don't drink, we don't smoke we do different things that help us have a healthy lifestyle.

12:22:04

A:

But perhaps there was something there that we should have known about and been more cautious of. But as a child, you know my brothers, my family and I we ate vegetables from the garden all the time, we drank milk from the cows, we drank the water, we did it all, you know. And right now we're still okay. I'm the youngest of my family, Mel is seven years older and Norm is 12 years older than I am and Bill is 16 years older. So they're getting to a ripe old age to where they're looking at retirement.

12:22:35

A:

They're pretty healthy and that's a good thing, so (laughing). But you do worry about it of course.

12:22:45

Q:

Now in the mid-80s, of course, that's when a lot of the publicity happened with the dust collector leak. How did you react to that and where were you living at the time and how did you react to that?

12:22:55

A:

I was living on George Road up in Okeana and my brothers told me about that and uh I don't know, really with all the other things going on it didn't really affect me, I mean I was already aware of the

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water. I think I was more concerned about the water turning bad than I was the dust. And they tested lots, I mean we have we have, there's wells all over the place down there.

12:23:19

A:

Um, my grandpa's farm there's probably ten test wells there now and there was a barn there that was moved across the road when the property was bought. We had a barn that set right across from the farm and they moved it to the other side. So we saved that, that was what we had saved. But as far as the dust, I don't know I really wasn't that concerned about it.

12:23:43

A:

I was more concerned about the water contamination because that's what we used all the time.

12:23:50

What was it like to know that *60 Minutes*, *20/20*, *48-Hours* and all those kinds of stuff was coming into town?

12:23:56

Yeah, that was terrible. We were asked at one time to have a family picture of my brothers and all of our family and kids sitting around the kitchen table looking sad. We were all supposed to sit there and look like we were all dying and they wanted to take a picture. And our cows were on the front cover of Newsweek.

12:24:13

A:

And we said there is no way that your coming down here and were going to pose this picture for you because we don't feel like you really hurt us that much. You know, yes there are things going on we don't want to be pushing the buttons on people that really aren't trying to hurt us. They've always been nice to us from the plant. They've really treated us well and to do something like that was really uncalled for. There was no way we were going to pose for a sad looking picture.

12:24:42

Q:

Wow, um, what myths of legends have you heard about the plant?

12:25:06

A:

Well, when it first started when the letter came out from Lisa, everyone would ask me if I glowed in the dark and I'm sure you've heard that before. That's been a thing out here (laughing) and in the middle of the country with all the lights down there, when you go by at night it does glow in the dark because it's like a city out in the country.

12:25:25

A:

And you know for awhile people said, oh it doesn't glow because of the lights in the parking lot, it's because of the stuff they make back there. And, I you know I sort of got tired of that, there were very many people who would say, don't you glow in the dark don't you drink that glowing milk and things

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like that. You know, it's just kind of a negative connotation.

12:25:45

A:

People were wondering about your health and well being because you had lived there all of your life and they still do, we still get comments that way. But not as much here lately as we did in the 80s and that's not a real good thing to be happening do you think (laughing)? No.

12:26:05

Q:

I always hear that from people too, do you glow at night and I always say I never heard that before.

12:26:11

A:

Oh yeah that's a big one out here. That's a big one.

12:26:16

Q:

Um, how do you think just from your recollection how do you think the plant changed the surrounding community?

12:26:22

A:

Well, I don't know I sort of felt that they kind of they kept to themselves a lot and just did their own thing. As far as bringing people in for employment there in Ross. Most of the town in Ross was settled by people who worked at Fernald, and Ross is really growing. You know I'm a teacher at Morgan and we have lots children that their parents have worked there or their grandparents have worked there.

12:26:46

A:

So it brought a lot of employment out here. But as far as changing it for negative, like I said when my brothers and I get together we roll out the maps and they show us where the contamination is and what it is that's being contaminated and what is in the water and that's not a very light ah, thing to look at.

12:27:05

A:

It just seems like there's arsenic, and there's different things that are going at different levels and the water's getting worse all the time. And hopefully they've got a plan to clean that up and you know get some of that out of there.

Q:

You mentioned your students and what are their attitudes towards the plant?

A:

They don't really know about it, um, I teach second grade so they're only 7 years old, but um, (laughs) a bumble bee is after her I think.

Q:

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Oh no.

12:27:36

A:

Um, they don't really know about the plant or what it does. Ah, they may have heard from their parents that, you know they're contaminating the water out here. But there's never really a point in time where it comes up. In you know, our course of study or anything, we really don't teach about that.

12:27:51

A:

I told you I did a Globe Program with my students where they collect water samples and they test for pH and they do current air temperature and so forth, and we enter that in the internet and all goes into a, a computer and is, is read by the scientist and um, meteorologist all over the world. And the kids look at our, um area by satellite, they get satellite images to see, you know, what this looks like.

12:28:17

A:

The plant, I did learn when I was in Oak Ridge Tennessee, that the ah, GPS's that you use to find places, Fernald is scat-, scrambled as is Oak Ridge Tennessee. So, if you use a GPS out, around here to try to find your position on a globe you get false reading. And I said "oh, why is that?"

12:28:39

A:

And they said this was a bomb ssp-, ah, spot and so they scrambled all the incoming communication signals for a GPS and so you can't get a global positioning ah, unit to ah, position you here on the globe, as in Oak Ridge Tennessee.

12:28:59

A:

And, and I didn't know that until about 4 years ago, and I thought that was very interesting, because that was supposed to throw off a s-, missile's homing device, like they cannot set it for a certain latitude and longitude out here because the plant has it scrambled. I thought that was interesting.

12:29:19

Q:

Wow I had never heard that one before.

A:

Um-hmm, Uh-huh. Oak Ridge, Tennessee is where I, I learned that and they said that's also true for the Fernald plant here, too. And probably for other spots around the United States as well.

Q:

We're gonna take a little bit of a break because we need to change tapes.

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Tape FLHP0083

13:01:00

Q:

I just have a few more questions,

A:

Okay.

Q:

We won't go too much longer. Um, what made you decide to be a teacher?

A:

Because I love kids. I started out with my older brothers and when they started having their kids, it was just fun to be around little kids. And uh, I'd baby-sit a lot when I was young, and I really believe that that was my uh, gift from God because I really do love being a teacher, and if that's the way I'm gonna change the world.

13:01:29

A:

I mean if I'm, you know the kids that I have, I'm not gonna have all that many, but in the years that I teach, the ones that I have I hope that I can touch their lives and you know that they can go on and look back at our class and say, "Well I learned a lot in there". And I'm really into science, and I think being raised on a farm down there did that for me.

13:01:46

A:

Because you know, I used to watch the calves being born and I used to chew wheat to make chewing gum out of it and just all kinds of things. And so as I got to be a teacher, and found out that kids like to know these kinds of things, it really got me turned on to science, and kids have a natural curiosity about why things happen and how this works, and what causes this to be this way.

13:02:08

A:

And so second graders are just little sponges for those kind of things. And uh, at our school Morgan where I teach, I'm real happy to say that I've started a land lab. We have an area of 17 acres that's a wild like prairie behind our school, and I had the janitor cut trails there.

13:02:24

A:

And we take the kids back and we set up different kinds of trails, we have a poetry trail, we have a nature trail, an un-nature trail, a mystery trail, and the kids go through there and they do different things in the land lab. And right in the back of our school, there's a circle where cars turn around.

13:02:40

We made that into a butterfly garden, and uh, Floral Daniels (Fluor Daniel) has been very helpful in giving us the right kind of bushes in there and get that started. So now you go over there and there's butterflies all over the place. And as that grows, and becomes more of a wild area, there'll be a lot

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more butterflies.

13:02:58

A:

And one of the first things I start out with every year with my students is I get swamp milkweed from Wisconsin. I put the little monarch caterpillars on it, and right in our classroom, we watch them grow and turn into caterpillars, or butterflies, I said it wrong. And undergo metamorphosis and the kids, all the kids coming out of second grade have a big appreciation for butterflies and caterpillars, and all the things that you know, come from that.

13:03:23

A:

And so I, that's been my calling in life, and I know that I've picked the right thing. I really do enjoy it. Now in the summer, I travel to University of Wisconsin and I teach up there for two weeks to teachers who they bring in, and we try to inspire these teachers to do the kinds of that we like to do, and you know do the caterpillars and the birds and all the different natural things with the kids.

13:03:46

A:

And you know we have a bird sanctuary at our school, and the kids, when they find money lying on the floor, instead of saying, who does this belong to? They put it in the bird jar. We have a little jar in our room, and kids walking down the hallway 'll find money and they'll come poppin' in and they drop it in the bird jar. And the bird jar usually has about five or six dollars in there.

13:04:03

And I'll take it down to LPG in um, Shandon and they'll give us bird seed. And so we put all the bird seed out for the birds all winter, and the kids watch the birds, you know, and it's pretty neat. You so I'm proud to say that you know, that's something I've accomplished as a teacher and this past year, I've worked with the Butler County soil and water district.

13:04:23

A:

And they've been very helpful with helping me get the land lab started and activities to do and suggesting where to do and how to do it. And they wanted me to run for um, Ohio Conservation Teacher of the Year, and I got it. I was really proud of that. That, that's, that's kind of neat because you know I really do have a deep commitment to teaching the kids about the environment.

13:04:45

A:

And I tell the parents on Open House night that one of the things that they'll learn in this class is a better appreciation for nature. And how it works and you know, they're gonna understand a lotta more a lot more about animals and creatures when they leave this room, and they do. They really do.

13:05:00

A:

And I, in the house there's a lots o' flowers sitting around that I got from my kids on the last day of school that, you know, we, we had a great year, I really had a good year this year with the kids. So that's, that's something that I feel proud of.

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Q:

Tell us a little bit about Sue Walpole, she happens to be a Fernald employee.

A:

Right. She's uh, w-, with their education department I understand, and she has helped uh, come up with ideas to, to use at our school. She and Jim Bier, who you may know, he's a teacher at our middle school, and I've always admired him and the way he does science with his kids.

13:05:34

A:

And he has helped develop some programs that the um, the middle school students use to learn about contamination and how to decontaminate things, and how to filter water and take things out of water. Sue Walpole, I met her first at Miami in a class that I took uh, was sponsored by the Institute For Chemical Education.

13:05:55

A:

And she was there to tell us about Floral Daniels (Fluor Daniel) and the programs that they offer to the public, and I understand there are lots of things that they can come to your school and do, and you know, work with your kids. And at the middle school, they've put up a green house, and the middle school kids with Jim Bier and Al Gross, they do um, do lots of different plants.

13:06:16

A:

I think they even sell some of them. I think you're supposed to make it into something that can generate a little bit of income so you can keep buying seeds and redoing it year after year. And Floral Daniel (Fluor Daniel) has helped a lot with that, so and you know and Sue is the contact person for that. So that's how I've, I've come in co-, contact with her a few times. She's been very helpful.

Q:

So as a teacher that's uh, concerned about uh, teaching environmental, especially environmental um, issues, about environmental issues, um, how do you see Fernald as maybe an opportunity to teach kids about that particular subject?

03:06:57

A:

Well, I've noticed that here on Paddy's Run Road that they put up a little um, like nature um, observatory, where you stop there and you look at the different things, and I understand there are some students from Miami who are measuring how much damage the deer do to the trees that are, are planted. There's lots of things like that you can do with kids.

13:07:18

A:

Ah, taking kids to a place you know, taking kids out in the woods, there's just so much to learn from that. And if you're truly concerned about how you're gonna change and make things better, that's a very good place to start. And with the facilities that they have back there, the woods and the creeks the lakes, you know, I'm sure they can do more with the kids if they can come up with some programs.

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13:07:39

A:

It'd be nice to take field trips there, and um, show the kids different things. I understand that they're talking about um, perhaps making an Indian burial site back there, that would be great with the kids. One of the things I'm working on in our land lab is to put up a pioneer village, and I've already found a man who is willing to donate a, a teepee.

13:08:01

A:

And I just have to just, get the right funding for this and different things happening, but we would like to like, construct a small pioneer village or an Indian village at our school, and they could probably help us with that. And I know Joe Schomaker, who I had his grandson this year, you know, he's very interested in those kind of things too, and he knows a lot about the history.

13:08:23

A:

And having him come into our school, he talks to our third graders because that's a part of their course of study in social studies. He comes over and he tells 'em about the different Indian tribes who lived in this area, and how the different towns got their names, and you know, all that is very interesting to the kids. Kids need to know that there's a past there, to build upon the future.

13:08:43

A:

If they understand what happened in the past, it helps them better understand you know the future and what's gonna happen later on. And how to preserve things, you know, how to keep it natural and neat and so forth.

Q:

And how do you feel about the cleanup efforts right now at Fernald?

13:09:00

A:

Well it, right now it seems like it's a mess. Every time I go down there, there's more trailers, more trucks, more people drilling, more people walking around. You know it, I think it's lost some of its um, beauty. But I think the wells and so forth can be taken out and you know planted over and maybe in the future it'll turn into more of a park atmosphere.

13:09:22

A:

Because it seemed like a park atmosphere to me. When I was small and riding my pony back there, the trees were beautiful, it was, you know we'd mow it, a couple of times a year, and keep the grass down for the cows. But the woods were pretty and you could walk through the woods, you know, and swing on the grapevines, and do things like that that kids really like to do.

13:09:39

A:

And I hope that in the future, you know they'll have that in mind and that they'll put it back in the park. I really would like to see it put turned into a park. I think that would be something really nice for our

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community. That they could get more use out of it. Because right now, I think people feel afraid to go back there. And I know there was some talk about putting soccer fields and so forth back there.

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13:09:58

A:

And I heard some people say, I would never let my kids play soccer back there. And I thought, why, what's it gonna hurt? But um, that, that's, I, I've heard talk about that and I've heard people who real-, have real reservations about doing that. But I think that's maybe the best thing that could be done, to turn it back to the community and know, some things that they could use back there.

13:10:18

A:

And I applaud your Living History Project, because it looks like that's a step in the right direction toward that kind of thing.

Q:

Thank you.

A:

Good job with that.

Q:

Um, Something we didn't discuss earlier, was eminent domain, and your family lost some of its, some of its land eminent domain. Were you old enough to remember how that all happened?

13:10:41

A:

Not really, just what my father had told me. Um, like I said, my grandpa owned the original property there. And the corner where the Knollman Dairy Farm is was owned by a Dr. Simmons, who my father purchased that property from. And when we moved to the big farm in 1952, that had already been, the property for the plant had already been, what am I trying to say, purchased, and set up.

13:11:11

A:

And I understand it's a square mile, like 640 acres there? And at my grandpa's farm, all I was told was that uh, we didn't get much for it and they told us if we didn't sell it they were gonna take it from us anyway, and so we settled upon their price, and we were allowed to move the barn, and I don't believe that they paid to help us move the barn.

13:11:31

A:

I think that we just had it jacked up and moved it across the road on wheels. There's a picture somewhere, of the barn coming across the road and being put where it is now. But it was a fairly new barn, and so it was a shame to tear it down and that's what would've happened if it had remained there on the property at Fernald.

13:11:49

A:

Because there's no, the houses that were there were, are gone, and it was just pretty well flattened, except for the, the buildings that Fernald built in the back there, the Atomic Energy Commission. And I can hardly keep up with the different names for the place. Every time I turn around it has a different

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name. I'm not sure what to call it. (laughs) The Atomic Energy Commission is what we call it.

13:12:11

A:

And when I was little it was the Atomic Plant. You know, don't go back to the Atomic Plant, or there's the man from the Atomic Plant. And that's what we called it when I was a kid, and that's how I understood it.

Q:

Are you active at all with uh, any of the public groups, at Fernald?

13:12:26

A:

No, I'm not. And I, I think that's because, it just really makes me feel kinda bad to go to some of those. My brothers have attended some of them, they go, they even take turns. They say we're not all gonna go to the same one. Because it's kinda depressing. You go there and you learn about how the land is getting worse.

13:12:43

A:

You know, you, you hear all the, and you hear people screaming and yelling about it. And there's really nothing they can do about it. And it's just, it's depressing to me to spend my evening hours you know at those meetings hearing about bad things. And so I just have sh-, shied away from 'em.

13:13:00

A;

I read the reports that they send, and you know I'm glad that they're offering tours to people to go through the plant, but I just kinda find it depressing to go to the meetings and listen to people stand up and yell and scream about the things going on back there. Um, that's just my personal feeling on it.

Q:

If you could go back in time, and say something to one of the Atomic Energy Commission people about your family and Fernald, what would you say to them?

13:13:29

A:

Be careful what you do. Don't destroy the land, and you know, make things worse for people who live around here. But I guess you know there has to be places where they do these kinds of things, because our country defends, you know, defends itself, and it has to. So there's just gonna have to be areas that these kinda things go on.

13:13:49

A:

But perhaps if the pits were built correctly in the beginning, it wouldn't be leaching down into the water lines, and I know that they're working on how to keep it from going any farther. And they move things from one place to another, and redistribute and you know, move some of them out of the area.

13:14:08

A:

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But maybe you know, we didn't know enough at that time, to be able to save it. They didn't know that this was all gonna happen. I, I don't think, I think they probably knew that what they were doing was very dangerous. But I don't think that maybe the long-term um, problems, associated with you know, all the different chemicals and so forth that they handled back there.

13:14:30

A:

So I, you know, if I had to look back on it and say, Just be careful what cha do, and try to leave things as they were when ya came here. Leave the, especially the water. Because water you know, we don't get any more. Please conserve it.

13:14:44

A:

I have a little note at school, "Please take care of our water, there'll never be any more". When we talk about water, I hold up a glass o' water and I say, "This may be the same water that a dinosaur drank". You know, and the kids all go, ooooh. But then we talk about the water cycle and how we really never make any more water.

13:15:00

A:

So what we have, we really have to take care of. And water's gonna be a very important thing I think in our future. We make a lot o' waste, Americans do. We're very, very much wasteful pe-, people. With all of our plastics and our landfills, and all of those things.

13:15:17

A:

I, I hope that you know, we'll learn better ways to recycle and, and reduce, reuse and recycle, are the Three-Rs that we talk about at school, and I hope that we all learn to do a better job at that.

Q:

Good, good. Um, is there anything that you'd like to add?

A:

I can't think of anything (laughs).

13:15:39

Q:

Now I noticed on here, well there's one little note on here that uh, you had to go and see a psychologist?

A:

Yes, yes. Um, that was part of the emotional distress uh, part of the, the plant, when they were distributing money, they asked you if you had any kind of emotional distress over the plant. And when my brothers and I talked about it, we said, well yes. You know, this has pretty much affected our life and our farm and how everything is, is going to be, you know, the future down here.

13:16:08

A:

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And so we all went to visit a psychologist. And um, we made an appointment with a psychologist that was hired by the plant. And when I went there, I thought, my gosh, why is this guy asking me these

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questions? He's getting into your sex life, you know. And I'm thinking, what does this have to do with, with Fernald?

13:16:28

A:

And you know, when I came home, I told my husband, I said, well, that was really a mistake to go to that. I just said I just felt like somebody just wanted to know my innermost workings and everything that I did every minute of the day. And he says, well you know, at least it's over with.

13:16:41

A:

And so later on when we went down to court, and I was sitting there listening to people get up and talk to the judge, there was a lady ahead of me, and she started in on this psychologist, and she said, "You know this guy was more interested in my sex life than he was with my emotional distress with the plant."

13:16:58

A:

And I thought, hmm. You know, yes. I thought the very same thing but I hadn't talked to anyone else about it who had gone. And um, (laughs) As time went on, I found out there were a lot of other people, that the women, particularly were singled out and asked those k-, type of questions, and I just feel like perhaps we had the wrong person there doing the interview.

13:17:19

A:

On that, or, or a poor choice of a psychologist that they chose to do these things. The men, when my brothers went, they didn't ask them anything like that. They just asked them about what were, what was their earliest memory of a uh, hurt. What, what was the earliest thing that you remember that hurt you and tell me about that.

13:17:38

A:

He didn't ask me about those kinds of things. You know, and I just, and when the hour was up, he looked at his watch and he says, our time is up. And it was just cold, and was outta there, but I was glad to get over, get that over with. But you know, there, there's another, I did that because of the plant. I wouldn't have had to go through that if it hadn't been for the plant.

13:17:57

A:

So there's another thing that's you know, a time that I don't recall with fondness. (Laughs aloud) and I, I told her that in the report. Maybe that's not the thing to put on tape, but I do feel like that was, perhaps there were other women who were exploited in that same manner who went to that same psychologist.

13:18:18

Q:

That's good to know. I'm glad you told us. I am glad you told us. Now are you on the medical monitoring program?

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A:
Yes.

Q:
Can you tell us about how you got involved in that, and what it entails?

Yes. Well, at the very beginning, when they came out and said that's what they wanted to do with the F-, with the residents. We talked about that and we said, that would be a good thing for our whole family to do. So we just sort of enrolled as a whole family. I mean my father and my, my stepmother who lives there and my brothers and their children and wives, and you know,

13:18:45

A:
We, we will keep that up. We feel like you know, that's, that's something that sort of makes you go to the doctor. 'Specially the men in our family are very hard to get to the doctor, as most men are, and when those come around, you know, you say, you're going whether you like it or not. I think that's probably a good way to monitor our health over the, the years.

13:19:04

A:
And now I understand they, they do the physicals like twice, twi-, or every two years. It started out 3 or 5 years, I forget, but yes, we're gonna keep that up. I think that's a good, I think that's one o' the really good thing that shows that the people back there are caring about the people who live around the plant.

13:19:22

A:
That's probably the most positive thing I've seen that you know will help people identify cancers early and be able to treat them early and perhaps you know, keep you from dying from cancer if you're gonna get it.

Q:
And how do you feel about the class action suit and the settlements and that stuff?

13:19:41

A:
Oh, I have mixed feelings about that. I don't know, I guess, you know it all started with Lisa Crawford in the letter that we showed her. If it had been my family with the letter, we never would've done that. We would have, you know, I don't know what we would've done, but perhaps we wouldn't ev-, things wouldn't have become full hilt like they are now.

13:19:59

A:
But, we probably will look for a different way to handle things rather than going to national news, and things like that. Um, you know, I guess it's good that the government will say that they have done some things wrong and try to compensate the people for those things, but yet I don't know. I, I really have mixed feelings about all that and how it came to be.

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Q:

Is there anything that uh, we didn't cover that you wanted to say? Or anything?

A:

Oh I, no I can't think of anything. I don't know, it's, it's been different (laughing) living here with that. You know it's like, I guess if, if my family, my farm family background, if we had located somewhere else, we probably wouldn't have had all these problems, as we, as we have had since all of the news broke about the land contamination and so forth.

13:20:53

A:

And you know, like I said, it's been a big issue whenever we get together, Christmas, whenever you know, whenever the family gets together, it, there's never a time when it doesn't come up, what's going on with Fernald. And you know that they're drilling another well at this house or that house, or they found this in this field, or you know, the arsenic level has risen in the water.

13:21:14

A:

It's, it's always a topic of conversation that comes up. But you know, we try to take it in a positive note because there's not a whole lot we can do about it. And I don't think any of us plan on moving away from this area because we're pretty much of a traditional family and it's nice to have your family close by, and even our kids' kids, I you know, will probably be raised in this area.

13:21:37

A:

Because it's, it's offered a lot being raised in the Cincinnati area. Our, our kids, (with her right hand, indicates herself) my brother's children, they've gone to college and you know, they've become engineers and builders and different things like that and they usually can find a job somewhere in this area, and so most of our family still lives you know, within this area where we all get together.

13:21:58

A:

And we have strong traditional ties, church and family ties, with our family. And you know, it's probably top, number one in our goal in our family is to keep everybody together. To have a lot of reunions and um, get-togethers and you know celebrate birthdays and weddings and all those things,

13:22:16

A:

And so, we're a pretty traditional family that will probably, all of us live in this area and die in this area and be buried in this area I'm sure. So.

Q:

Well thank you so much for taking the time to give us your thoughts.

A:

Well, you're welcome.

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Q:

We're gonna get some nat sound now which just means we need to get sort of the room tone and the birds singing, so (both talking at once now) if we can just have quiet on the set.

A:

The birds singing? The big plane that went over? Did ya hear that?

Q:

That's right (both laughing).

Well, I think we're directly in the path. About 7 o'clock at night, there'll be about 6 jets that go over and they're about 5 miles away from each other and they'll just go shfff, right into the plant. Or into uh, the airport. Yeah. And in the morning once in a while, about this time there'll be one or two. I'm glad they don't do it all day long. Well did I do okay?

13:23:02

A:

Yeah! We're gonna get some nat sound so if we could have quiet on the set just for a minute. Just stay right where you are, and, you're fine (chuckles).