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Transcript

Name: Mark Maxwell

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Tape: 30

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Tape FLHP0060

12:01:19

Q:

OK, the first question we ask you really is a hard question. We need you to give your name and then spell it.

A:

My name is Mark Maxwell. And that's M-A-R-K M-A-X-W-E-L-L.

12:01:33

Q:

Great, and uh you can just talk to me (Okay) and totally ignore the camera and all that stuff. Um, first of all if you can give us a little background, first of all like where was you born, where did you grow up, where did you go to school, uh those kinds of things.

12:01:46

A:

I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and raised here. Uh, went to an elementary school, St. Stevens Elementary School which is no longer. Purcell High School, University of Cincinnati, Xavier University, uh for a Master's Degree.

A:

Taught here in the city for Cincinnati Public Schools for a couple of years and then Purcell High School for 5 years and during those summer months worked at Fort Scott Camp and eventually became the director there of the boy's camp and then took a full time position with the camp and worked there until it closed. Been around the city all my life. Today I work with the Girl Scouts in Greater Cincinnati as their development director.

12:02:31

Q:

Terrific. And tell us a little bit about your family.

12:02:35

A:

I married a girl counselor from Fort Scott Camp and we have three children. Joann and I have three children, Susan is a senior in high school graduating this year. My son is graduating from the eighth grade and a son who will be in the fifth grade. (Terrific). Susan, Jeff and Danny. I better name all three names otherwise they'll really be mad at me.

12:03:04

Q:

That's right. Uh, Okay, first of all um, tell us a little bit about Fort Scott Camp when you first got there.

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A:

When I first got there I probably was a little bit older than most people coming to camp as a counselor. I had already graduated from college. I was teaching. The summer camp director was an acquaintance who had taught me in high school. I had done my student teaching with him and he asked me if I would consider taking a job in a camp and I kind of chuckled and said why not let's try something different.

12:03:48

A:

And uh, so I went there and it was just one of the neatest experiences I had ever had in my life. I was a senior cabin counselor, another counselor and myself had anywhere up to 24 - 36 boys that were a cabin, I was the director of the athletic department, had a staff of about five in that group that were all cabin counselors also. And we basically did a camp thing.

12:04:20

A:

And it was just probably one of the neatest was the summer of 1974 and it was a really, really great experience. It made a lot of, met a lot of folks, met a lifelong friend. Folks that I still see today on a regular social occasion where people who were counselors during those years. I met my wife, the person who eventually became my wife, that summer and we just had a lot of good times. But also I think we were really good in providing the kids who came to camp a really good time a great experience.

12:04:59

A:

Um, just Fort Scott was just kind of a world unto itself, once you went inside the gates, you closed out, for fairly a lot too many years we closed out the rest of the world. We didn't even have newspapers. I can remember listening to Richard Nixon resignation speech, laying on a hillside at a we had a variety show that night, people didn't have a radio, we'd never heard that it happened.

12:05:26

A:

So it was really interesting. Uh, spent two summers doing similar duties as a cabin counselor and a athlete director. And then summer as an assistant director and then two years as boy camp director and that's when I knew reality was beginning to settle into my life and things were getting serious and you really had to work for a living.

12:05:47

A:

Because then the responsibilities started to build. And did that for a couple of summers and then became the Executive Director from 1979 till the last summer was 1988. Um, went from being head of one of the counselors who had responsibility but never realized how much to just really having a lot of responsibility for we had upwards of 400 plus children a week.

12:06:17

A:

Boys and girls, 200 something boys and 200 something girls and uh, with that comes 800 parents and associated relatives. A lot of folks you had to keep happy. It was a lot of fun.

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12:06:35

Q:

What was a typical day like, first of all when you were a cabin counselor?

A:

When I was a cabin counselor? Uh, we'd get up at typically 7:30 in the morning, somewhere in that general area. Even though I didn't know it at that point in time, Fernald's whistle woke me up in the morning. I think it went off at 7:30 and it woke me up in the morning. We were about a mile south of the plant.

12:07:02

A:

And then we had a old record player, a scratchy bugle record that played "Reveille", then you really knew it was time to get up. And we'd get up and get the boys and go out to flag raising, from flag raising they'd walk over to a dining hall where we had a group meal, family style meal.

12:07:25

A:

Everybody sat by cabins. Then we'd go off and do 3 hours of morning program, oh after the children had their breakfast, they'd come back and clean themselves up, they'd do their cabin cleanup. That was part of the community living experiences, they all worked together to clean their cabins, make their beds. Uh, which remained made for about 5 minutes and then they were in shambles again but uh, and then they would go off and do programs and we had a variety of programs. There were two really large pools at camp, one for boys, one for girls.

12:07:56

A:

Um, and when I first went to camp most of the children stayed for 2 weeks, by the time we closed camp a transition had happened and most folks came for 1 week. Um and most of the camping today if you're staying in general community the camping is for 1 week but most of them would come for 2 weeks. Uh, we'd do morning program, program could be anything from nature, Indian Lore, program athletics, recreation. Athletics being more sports organized, games recreation being more fun games.

12:08:32

A:

Uh, crafts program, swimming as I mentioned, horseback riding and the groups of children would move from area to area. There would be archery and we had a BB range and it was just a really, I think the children came just typically had a really good opportunity. They ranged in age from 7 - 15,16 years old and came from all walks of life.

12:09:03

A:

It was just a real melting pot. Boys particularly, girls followed a very similar schedule but they were always told there's an imaginary line that you're not allowed to cross unless you're on official business and I always managed to find official business.

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12:09:17

Q:

Which is how you met your wife?

A:

Which is how I met my wife.

12:09:21

Q:

How many acres is the camp? How big is the camp?

A:

Camp was 250 acres. Um, there was probably, I'm going to make a rough estimate of 100 acres were cleared and that was kind of the camp setting. There were 18 cabins that slept 9 boys and a counselor in the boy's camp. And then 2 larger cabins were referred to as the senior cabins so I imagine it slept 24 boys and 2 counselors or more.

12:09:48

A:

And in the girls camp there were actually 22 cabins that slept about 9 girls and a counselor each and a senior cabin that slept about 24, 28, 30 girls somewhere around there and they had 2 counselors in that cabin.

12:10:15

A:

Um, and the boy's camp was kind of on the upper hill and the girl's camp was on the lower hill and um that was the cleared area. The two pools were in between, each had a separate dining hall, there was a one stable with horses. The girls followed a similar program. Um, but you know and that's where the general program happened.

12:10:38

A:

There were ball fields and all kinds of open space there and then you went into the woods there was probably about 150 acres of all woods and I'm just making a guess there. And then there were a lot of acres of woods that belonged to the surrounding farms that actually we used and used that well.

12:10:58

Q:

And where's the camp in relation to the Fernald site?

A:

It's about a mile south, um, down River Road. It's actually between Les Flick's Homelike Inn and New Baltimore, Ohio and 128 and it sits on the roadway there. The river really goes into a large bend right there and the camp sat up on the west side of River Road and there was an entryway with fences, a gated entryway, we had a gatekeeper who at night had to keep us counselors under control.

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12:11:32

Q:

Which was always a job.

A:

Which was always a job.

12:11:36

Q:

Now um, when you became director, what were your responsibilities as director?

A:

Um, when it was director of the boy's camp which was first, my job there was simply to establish the schedule, hire the staff. Um, you know do some parent interaction, basically manage the boy's camp. Assure that it was clean and ready to go and things got done every day. That there was a schedule to follow and did I mention manage the boy's staff again? That in itself was 25 hours a day of work. Nah, they were a good group of folks.

12:12:23

A:

And as I evolved into the position, I became more or less responsible then as Executive Director for interacting with the board, the advisory board or board of directors, and went through transition, creating a budget, doing all the bill paying, bookkeeping, working with the maintenance director of the camp who resided on the grounds and working with him to make sure the grounds were safe for children and that things were, the work was done around the camp.

12:13:04

A:

Hired the administrative staff, the cooks, the camp directors themselves and that was you know during the summer basically oversaw the day to day operations of the camp. During the winter, did a lot of the promotion, public relations, creating the brochures, making sure that information got out. Advertising, going out and talking about the camp, recruiting staff, whole myriad of things.

12:13:33

Q:

Wow, that's a lot. Now during the summer, when you were working at the camp, after you were married and had some children, you lived on site?

A:

I did.

12:13:48

Q:

Can you tell us a little bit about living right there at the camp?

A:

What an experience. Um, my children referred to it as their summer home. At that point in time we had two, actually my daughter was born just a week before staff training in 1981 so as I bringing my

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wife from the hospital I'm heading out for my busiest time of my year. Might not be good planning but that was her last day of school so things worked out for her. Um, and um, we um, so that summer I commuted and in the summer of 1982 we moved back out.

12:14:32

A:

We had a little house that had two bedrooms and a common sitting area and a screened in porch. And either we'd go to the dining hall and eat our meals or just bring them over to the house and just kind of relax. And use that time as family time because typically the job kept you going pretty much of the day and into the evenings a lot.

12:14:54

A:

And for the first years, I still got some video downstairs of my daughter swimming in the pool probably when she was one or two years old learning how to swim with little water wings on. But it was always an adventure to kind of pack up everything and leave and go out there. By the summer of '85 I now had two children, so we had a 6-month-old infant with us.

12:15:23

A:

And it was, there were only two bedrooms as I mentioned so you have a 4-year-old with a young one sharing a room. But they had a good time and then the son grew up I guess it was about '84 or '85, he was about four when the camp eventually closed and he still today has really good memories.

12:15:47

A:

I think he has his first memories probably out there and just really loved the camp. So I think we had a lot of fun, um still had to go home and cut the grass and do laundry and all those neat things but it was a different kind of life. But it was still an adventure. And I think that's when I had my own children, now with me is when I think the reality, the seriousness of the level of what we were trying to accomplish out there and what I had responsibility for was really settled in.

12:16:22

A:

Counselors probably felt that I became stricter but I think when you got your own you become more cognizant of sending your children away and what people expect. But, so it was a good summer adventure. It was a lot of fun. My daughter didn't get to camp for a year, she went and slept in a cabin. She was reminding me of that the other day that that was hard. I never realized that was hard but she said it was hard to be up there. But she had a lot of fun.

12:16:57

A:

Some girls that our maintenance director on the campground that lived on the campground, he had 5 girls and a boy and she remembered going off and playing with the girls a lot. And they had cattle, and going over to the cow pastures and just roaming, have a lot of fun.

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12:17:19

Q:

During the time that you were, well anytime that you were part of the camp, both as cabin counselor and as director, um, can you tell us just some of your favorite people that happened to be there, you remember any incidences?

A:

Um, you know if this ever got out in public there would be people I'd miss and I'd feel pretty bad. The gentleman that hired me was probably one of the all time characters. _____ was his name and I think he had probably been a teacher and a coach for Purcell High School when I was a student there and he had left there in 1968 and he went then and eventually worked for Cincinnati Public Schools and that's how I ended up _____ teaching with him. And he had been a counselor there in the '50's when he first came into the community from up East.

12:18:18

A:

Um, somehow he had latched with an old Marine buddy who was a counselor there and that's how he got hooked up with the camp. And he was going back as boys camp director and it just, I had been, I had never camped at the camp but I had been out there a couple of times for a variety of different picnics.

12:18:37

A:

And my brother had camped there for a couple of weeks in the early '50's. And I still had memories, those visual memories of the place, so when Wayne said to go I, don't need experience, let's go.

12:18:50

A:

And he really ran a good camp. And really, I think earned a lot of respect for his ability to take what was in 1973 '74, an institution that was kind of, some people had thought that maybe it had run its life expectancy. And really did a lot of building up and gave me some good things to work with as I moved into a different role through the years.

12:19:18

A:

He was certainly, is certainly a truly gentleman. Obviously my wife, Joann, she had come out there out of college, or she was still in college and came out as a summer counselor. A lot of good friendships made. Um, folks I still hang around with.

12:19:40

A:

There are five couples who still play cards once a month. Three of the couples met their wives there, six couples actually, five others. Four of us met our wives there, our husbands, depending on which viewpoint you take and uh, the others had relationships with the camp as counselors or whatever and um those have just always been some of my lifelong best friends. Folks that are attorneys today throughout town, just leaders in the community were folks that worked there in a variety of different ways.

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12:20:20

A:

Um, campers and just you know, there's one that just stays in my mind right now is a he camped there I think his first year in 1974 and came back every summer as a camper, as a counselor in training. Worked in the kitchen and worked as a counselor, I think he, I don't know the year he became a department director and ended up going working at Joy Residential Education Center as an outdoor person.

12:20:52

A:

Just really one of the neatest campers and today, today with his degree in Philosophy I believe, he's a clown for the Ringling Brother's Circus. So you meet people from all kinds of walks of life and you know, like I said, I'm going to get in trouble if anybody ever sees me naming names. But there were just a really neat group of folks that were part of the camp in a lot of different ways. Still get together like I said with the one group we still see at least a couple of times a year, other folks you know a variety of different ways.

12:21:35

A:

And this just wasn't in 1974, '75 it was through the years. I mean through all the years, as I was mentioning to you there was a reunion a couple of years ago and they had over 300 something people and something put together in about 6 months, from across the country, came back for the reunion. So.

12:21:59

Q:

That's great. Um, who operated the camp?

A:

Archdiocese of Cincinnati owned the camp property. (Excuse me) Operated the and but worked for the most part almost to its closure was fairly independently operated. And it was, but it was you know like one time it took the priest's signature on the application to allow you to gain entry to the camp and then that changed. _____ I'm sure there are those people that thought that wasn't the best thing that ever happened, typically had a priest there. As a chaplain during the summer, so we had masses and that.

12:22:53

A:

The population was always predominantly Catholic population throughout the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and folks from Indianapolis, Louisville and Lexington and points east. I need to back up and I need to mention one of the most important people one of the folks was Dr. Schroeder. Dr. Schroeder is going to be 89 this year, um, and he spent his life coming to camp every summer to be the resident physician. When he was working in the city he would come out at nights and commute. Spend the nights there.

12:23:45

A:

After he retired he spent day and nights there and just probably one of the most decent human beings you could ever meet. And the group of folks that I mentioned, they're having a reunion, they're having

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an 89th birthday party for him this year and he truly deserves it. He's a World War II veteran, camped as a camper probably I think he told me that site opened in 1924 and I think either '25 or '26 he was a camper there.

12:24:25

A:

Went from being a camper there, was a counselor there, to medical school. Went away, fought in the war, came back and, that's, actually in some point in time, I don't know the year, somewhere in the mid '80's, a Baptist Boarding school down in Kentucky. He hooked up with some folks down there, Oneida, Kentucky down and still the fact that he's down there now as there resident physician for the Boarding School and the only doctor in the community.

12:25:06

A:

Kind of giving life that he had, making think of a doctor as doctors being kind of a wealthy community citizen and he gave it life mostly to children and was really a true gentleman. I have to mention him.

12:25:31

Q:

Um, you mentioned sort of when the camp opened, can you give us sort of a brief description or history of Fort Scott, how long, you know when it opened officially, some of the major points?

A:

Um, I should have read that thing first. Some of this, 10 years later is a little bit age is catching up with me. The camp actually was started as a boys camp in 1922 further down the Great Miami River more near the Cleves area. And in 1924 the first part of the property on River Road was brought and they had camp and as I understand it at that point in time camp was primarily on the Great Miami River on the bank of the river.

12:26:22

A:

Um, and at that point and time was a boys only camp, operated through the summer, boys would come out primarily Seminarians would meet, the _____ and Seminary was the counselors at that point in time. And at some point in time, I'm believing it was the early '30's they did a half of the summer for boys and half of the summer for girls. They had started to develop a, the camp setting a little bit further up the hill. We saw that picture it's in 1939 so we know for sure girls were there.

12:27:17

A:

I think it was probably around that time, '39, was closed for a year or so during World War II years. That they constructed a separate boys camp and a separate girls camp, and then boys came for you know, so everybody could be there but they were running two separate entities. Um, in, priest by the name of Monsignor Wagner, Marcellus Wagner, was probably the most influential somewhere in the late '30's I believe.

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12:27:52

A:

He was assigned as the general director of the camp and was there into the late '50's. He did a lot of the purchasing as plots of land became available, he would buy them on behalf of the Archdiocese then went out and got the money from folks to build the camp. He knew some of the benefactors of the community and was able to get them to invest in this camp.

12:28:25

A:

I guess at that time with boys and then boys and girls and um the girls camp I think was rebuilt in the early '60's. It had been the original camp and then the boy's camp was built somewhere in the '50s, maybe late '40's that the cabins in the boy's camp were built and I'm really massacring this history whatever.

12:28:51

A:

I'll have to stop and read it real quick. But it was and um so Monsignor Wagner had a lot to do with it. One of the neatest buildings that he had built there was the chapel and it was a chapel of St. Victor and the person who donated it's son had been killed during the first World War in France. And it was a chapel he had described to his mother as I recall the story in a letter and that's how they modeled the chapel and it just is, Clement Barnhorn did some of the sculpting for it and it just is one of the most truly unique buildings in the city, in the community and it was used every day.

12:29:50

A:

But it was, so yeah, the plant itself just an air about it that was just outstanding. So close to the city but so far away and um so the camp moved and I think it got in flow with folks through the years you know, some years enrollment was up some years down mostly up um, had lost of good years and then it ended up closing in 1988.

12:30:21

Q:

And we'll get into that in just a second (right) we got to change tapes.

TAPE FLHP0061

13:01:05

Q:

During the break you mentioned to me that the surrounding township had sort of a different reaction to campers when they showed up in the summer.

A:

Well, yeah it was pretty much the quiet community 40 weeks of the year and then 10 weeks of the year you suddenly had 500 more residents, 400 campers and a staff of about 100 being from 18-22 years old for the most part. Yeah, there was a little bit some changes there. Sundays traffic would line up the road down River Road and uh Saturdays when children were getting picked up again.

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13:01:50

A:

I think the community, community is such a tight community that most of the people from the camp were city folks who came out there and kind of destroyed the serenity. They knew when they started seeing the campers that they would hear the bugle going in the morning.

13:02:07

A:

I could not get over the big deal because the whistle blew at Fernald at 7:30 and 4:30 so I don't know what the big deal was but the bugle would blow and we'd get neighbors calling, that PA is too loud because we played music on it all day, that's our past time.

13:02:22

A:

Kept life adventurous, Sly and the Family, was always "Hot Fun In The Summertime." That's the song that got everybody rocking and rolling. You know it could be early in the morning it just happened to be on you know you never knew what the day might bring and the neighbors always didn't like it but that was OK.

13:02:38

A:

So for that reason we were kind of intruders. Things just became a little bit more congested for them though I'm sure, as I mentioned I'm sure Les Flicks liked the amount of beer that he sold and the number of chicken dinners that he sold to parents on Sunday after they dropped their kids off at camp.

13:02:58

A:

So um, but you know that was in '70's era that I remember. There were other places prior to that but I don't remember, don't know all those. Um, so I think that it was just a matter of all of the sudden you know into a community of what was probably 500 people you dump another 500 people and as children want to be fences, what did they matter you know and every once in a while you'd have a way with a camper where they'd find themselves out on 128 because he chose to be there or he kind of got lost in the woods.

13:03:31

A:

And so, you know, I think the, in the community again you know, a community that never had a Catholic Church has this Catholic camp and it then, again they're all city people and they don't know the way of life out here. And we probably as an organization, institution weren't real good until the last few years of going out and finding out more about the community. Um, what could we do to work with them.

13:04:06

A:

And you know knowledge becomes a little bit of danger to all of us and uh, for a time it was truly just a June through August operation and as we began to do some things more year around we began to reach out to the community. Through the early '80's we had an outdoor education program from the

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Southwest School District come out and they would bring, for a week, they would bring all their 6th graders out from their feeder schools, Crosby and Harrison and uh Elizabethtown, bring their children out there.

13:04:44

A:

See that was neat because here are some for the most part children that had never seen a camp from the community. And I think that you know when you think about it, for the most part those who were enjoying the facility, weren't the people who lives there. So you know, there was a defensive reaction I think.

13:05:07

A:

They couldn't you know, maybe at one time perceive maybe those who couldn't afford it to go there and uh and we didn't in our organization we probably didn't do a real good job at reaching out the them, we didn't need them so why bother. But, that's what we found out later that you know you all grow up, grow older and real wiser.

13:05:32

Q:

So, if you could hear the Fernald whistle, could Fernald hear Sly and the Family Stone?

A:

I would imagine they could on a good clear day. I would imagine they could. Or "Hello Mudda Hello Fadda," I can't remember how many times a day until somebody swiped the record. That was the best thing that ever happened.

13:05:57

Q:

Um, in fact you were a mile from the plant and uh, when people would bring their children to camp were there many questions about the plant being so close?

A:

Uh, until 1984 no. The plant existed and we existed. Um, it was never a thought. I don't know that there was anybody who really knew a whole lot that was going on out there. Was trying to think, Feed Materials Processing Center in the middle of a rural environment with a checkerboard square and later I heard people saying well I just thought it had something to do with Ralston Purina Company.

13:06:42

A:

You know, I'd read the signs that said U.S. Government Property, I figured Ralston Purina didn't have a whole lot to do with it. Um, I never thought, never a real thought about anything along that line. Unfortunately, well, was December of '84-ish that the first questions of what was going on at Fernald became issues.

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13:07:10

A:

Um, I look back now when it was the beginning of the end of of the institution, uh, was this vast unknown that no one really knew and those that had some knowledge were either putting out dribs and drabs or it just wasn't, wasn't a fair exchange of information, let's put it that way, uh at that point and time.

13:07:48

A:

Concurring, not just all Fernald was that I think that folks found out that Western Hamilton County had been dumping grounds for lots of folks at that point in time. Fernald took the rap for a lot of things. I mean, they did enough that was of issue, but took the rap for a lot of things that I don't know necessarily were their fault.

13:08:13

A:

I think there were some other folks that were involved that today we still don't know who they are. Um, but in December of '84 that became an issue, um, we had to work real hard to keep our numbers up.

13:08:28

A:

One of the telltale signs as I look back was that we were not getting the repeat campers. We were filling the camp and getting the campers every summer but with each new splash of information we were losing more folks. Um, worked real hard um, at at trying now to have to reach out to the community to find out information, find out what was going, find out what had gone on. Uh, and became a information gathering testing of wells and waters and that became a priority.

13:09:22

A:

Um, 80, summer of '85, summer of '86 and '87 passed without major incident in regard to Fernald itself I think we were able to manage the first onslaught of information but I think it was still an unknown that was hanging out there. I think it was in '86 or '87 that Westinghouse then was operating the plant and asked for permission to put an early warning siren on the grounds.

13:09:53

A:

It was the highest part of the community, um and we did that, there was a summer where we had to wear beepers in case there was an emergency at the plant.

13:10:05

A:

We had buses on call to evacuate children and I think back now think now, we did everything I think that we could to manage the situation but it was getting a little bit more expensive for us to manage. Um, it was in the fall then after the 1988 camping season that probably the last worst onslaught of information came out, I think that's when Phil Donahue filmed a show in Hamilton, uh, it was national news, it was in Time Magazine. Um, and um, another, another camp in the area had chosen to close out of concern for safety of the children.

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13:11:10

A:

We began to see some of our fall rentals drop off and people saying well we were planning to come there but you know we can't be sure. And all the while we'd been water testing, air testing, soil testing, all kinds a variety of testing. Uh, Westinghouse was doing them for us, we were doing them independently and nothing that we could do, nothing that we saw said there was any harm but you couldn't manage the unknown. And that was the situation that we found ourselves in which was managing the unknown.

13:11:44

A:

Um, set up a _____ group in the fall of '88 to review the operation of the camp. Uh, had some really influential folks in the community. Um, Mike _____, he was the Chairman of the Board of Xavier University and been a former counselor there, was part of that long range planning group. Dan Averbek, George Turk, who's a partner with Arthur Anderson, Fred Roderman, uh just some folks throughout the community who were real um, quality people.

13:12:15

A:

And we did everything as far as looking at the operation, we were doing everything we could do. Probably one of the final nails in the coffin, proverbially was when the attorneys said well you know we can't see anything of harm but you have to put a warning label on to your brochure. That says to parents now that you have knowledge that there could be a potential health hazard to attending there.

13:12:48

A:

Now that you know that, you have to put a warning label on your brochure. Well, camps are supposed to be places where parents can allow their children to go and not really have to worry about those kinds of things. Environmental issues, and that was when I kind of, I was watching my livelihood evaporate, uh, but uh, you know how could you do that and ethically look at somebody and say but you know we're still going to have a great time.

13:13:19

A:

Uh, and that's when we as a board made a choice to give, a first choice to give our specific words to mothball the operation for a couple of years. And that then transitioned I think into the Archdiocese just wanted to get out of the liability all together and made the choice to close the camp and then subsequently sold the property.

13:13:55

A:

Um, it was hard. It was hard, because you know um, yeah, you're thirty-something years old and you've been there about 15 years, what was I 39 years old 38 years old, you don't need that part of that. But I had been there about 15 years and uh a lot of my personal life over the adult part of my life had been a part of the association to that and that was hard, losing that. Even though I knew that the decision that we were making was the right decision. It was hard to divorce yourself from.

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13:14:32

A:

And you know folks who want to say that well you were at fault because campers weren't coming back. Um, I don't think that was factual, I know that wasn't factual. But it was easier to blame the known than the unknown. Uh, it changed you know and my life probably needed a change but it changed a way of life for a lot of folks. The, probably the hardest thing was that the Diocese of Covington had also had a camp in Marydale and they had chosen during the summer of 1988 to close that camp.

13:15:14

A:

Uh, because the value of the property where they were located on Donaldson Road was just so enormous that they wanted to sell that property. So they, we knew they were closing their camp and folks then didn't know that in December of '88 we were closing our camp. Then I not only took the rap from people who wanted to come back to Fort Scott, those that thought they were going to Fort Marydale would come to Fort Scott.

13:15:43

A:

Why'd you do that? It really wasn't my choice I mean it was my livelihood. But uh, you know, uh, it was, that was tough because the children lost they need the opportunity. There's still summer camps that are out there, my son is going to summer camp this year and they do a marvelous job. But it just

was a loss of an opportunity. Four hundred children a year, four hundred children a week, three thousand children a year or so was just a loss of a really good institution.

13:16:22

A:

And when I look at the folks that I associate with staff member today and we reflect it's just that, they sense what they lost. I don't know that the community really understands what they lost.

13:16:43

Q:

Great. We're going to change tapes here. You're doing wonderful.

TAPE FLHP0061

13:17:03

Q:

Um, since you lived right there at the camp, um, what were your anxieties about Fernald?

13:17:28

Q:

I'll ask you the question again. Wait a minute, what did I ask? (Want me to check?). I know what I really want to ask, this is what I really want to ask. (You can ask it we're really rolling.) You're really rolling.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
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A:
Should I see a red light or not.

Q:
I've got it covered so you can't.

A:
OK.

13:17:49

Q:
Um, in 1984 there was an awful lot of press about what was going on with Fernald especially about a dust collector leak in plant, one of the plants, and when you were receiving this news from the media, how did you personally feel in relation to the camp?

13:18:10

A:
In relation to the camp. Um, threatened. Again, an unknown, probably had more faith in the government at that point in time to be able to tell the truth than they did in later years. Not really sure they learned their lesson though. Um, and I'm not sure it was all government, who was National Lead of Ohio? I mean, when you think about who was the entity.

13:18:41

A:
Who did they what were they. Um, I knew no one there to think of asking, to the process of even trying to ask the questions. Um, with 1984 came a lot of stories of what happened in the '50's, what happened in the '60's, uh, someone I was telling this story to the pre-interviewer that one of the most unique ones I heard in the former caretaker that was deceased by this time, me and this director of the camp who lived at the camp, apparently somebody had remembered a story that he supposedly told.

13:19:30

A:
It was one of these down the generation, that all the cows had died one time and somebody came around and paid for all the cows or paid them off for not milking the cows for a period of time. Um, and it was all because of that plant. Um, whether the facts are, but those kinds of stories started, started evolving and developing and took on a, a history of their own.

13:20:00

A:
Even though no one knew that, you know they remembered somebody saying and somebody saying and suddenly they were there. No one associated with the summer part of the operation never had any of that kind of knowledge. But now I found myself not only directing a camp but trying to open a camp, I found myself having to field questions from parents, rental groups that we were dealing with a variety of different associations trying to recruit staff who were environmentally savvy and knowledgeable.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
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13:20:31

A:

College age folks, um, not real sure, you know how much to say, what not to say. Uh, and so I think the way of, the way of, the way of work became a little bit more threatened to go back to the original word that I used. Um, long time supporters began to say, and I would say, but you know this is what they're saying, they being the NLO folks who now we had met or the government folks.

13:21:08

A:

And finding out you know next week that what you were using to base your information on finding out that somebody really hadn't been quite factual. Uh, nothing ever really leaked off of the camp, or off of the grounds. Nothing ever made it off the grounds, we have, and then finding out a month later that well yeah it kind of had and we knew this but. So then now your combating people saying well there may have been _____ but there isn't now to.

13:21:43

A:

You see where I'm going with that, the, there was no known enemy. How do you, how do you, how do you argue with what you don't know. How do you argue how you try to protect yourself from the unknown. And I think that's what became some of the issues. When, thinking at, somewhere along the line NLO transitioned out and Westinghouse folks came in. They had more open door policy.

13:22:13

A:

Um, one of the first things that they did, I'm blanking on his name, the CEO of the site invited myself and the priest that I was with to come up and meet with him and see the plant. And that was the first time that I had ever been inside of it. I really had no reason prior to that to be inside of it but they were, they were you know having a transition in the operation. But I don't know Westinghouse knew the gravity of the situation.

13:22:41

A:

And today I don't know what the gravity of the situation was because I don't know that anyone ever really got the whole story. And then it became so technical that it was almost, it was tough to absorb it all and to know it all. Um, I think for a couple of years there I felt like things were going pretty well, like I said, we were able to manage our own. We were taking safety steps and precautions. We were doing, like I said, water testing, soil testing, air testing.

13:23:18

A:

Um, it was interesting because now I look back on it and they were asking us to do more every year. And I'm thinking well if things aren't really that bad why are they asking us to do more every year. But, you know again, um, and to the point where like I said, the morning that I woke up and somewhere in 1988 after the camp had closed and toward the end of that summer, I think what had happened is that the amount of leakage somewhere had increased by multiples, large multiples.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
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13:23:58

A:

Over what had originally been said. And suddenly now my stake of my claim to being the parents, well this is what we're being told, this is the information that we are using. Well how do you know that it's accurate. Well the government is giving it who's giving it to us, and it's those people who are giving it to us. Well, you know, I don't trust that information

13:24:16

A:

Well that's the information that I have to give, that's what I know. And suddenly you find out that that was not all factual. Now went from threatened to anger, hurt, just real frustration. Um, and then became, like I said, became the kind of the target for the whole thing. Um, um, and you know and then by this time people want to blame Westinghouse. Well it wasn't Westinghouse. Westinghouse came in to manage it.

13:24:52

A:

Um, I'm thinking that was who was right after NLO, and they came in to manage the situation and tried to make the best out of a mess. Um, but I guess you know if people were not factual or if they lied, they lied to other people than me. You know, I think they lied in Washington D.C. People just weren't honest and that um, um.

13:25:23

Q:

What were some of the most frequently asked questions by some of the parents?

A:

Uh, water. Water quality. It's all groundwater, well it was all groundwater at that point in time. We had all on-site wells and in fact had lost a well to, at the spring of 199, '85, excuse me the spring of 1985, our winter well was closed. Um, early on I mentioned that there were other culprits other than Fernald or NLO out in Western Hamilton County and, used to be a lot of gravel pits along the river basin there and once the gravel pits were mined and empty, the people still owned the property.

13:26:10

A:

Now they began to take waste products from other institutions and organizations and whether here in the city or from out of the city and fill the gravel pits because it was a way of reclaiming the land. And they'd take 55 gallon drums of who knows what and dump them into that and people didn't know in the 1950's that those steel drums would eventually rupture and leak.

13:26:36

A:

So anyhow, a well that that was found to have I think formaldehyde in it, which everybody right away, you know, that's Fernald, that's Fernald, it wasn't, they had nothing to do with formaldehyde. But it was somebody else, but anyhow we had to close that well, that got some press. That's when we went into some serious water testing on a normal basis.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
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13:27:00

A:

Our summer well that we used was a lot deeper and further up the river beyond that initial site. But what that meant then was a fairly large expense of piping that water in to be used year around and coming up with a system to use that water system year around. It filled up a 50,000 gallon, 100,000 gallon water tower that we used all summer.

13:27:31

A:

Well you couldn't use that during the winter because it was all above ground it was all, the water lines were all just surface lines and so we had to go to frost free lines and we had to take the force of this pump and what we ended up having to do was pull one high powered pump and put a smaller one in. So every year it became more expense.

13:27:50

A:

That had nothing to do with Fernald but it was just a matter of managing which was another one of those thorns in the side, then trying to make it work. Um, so I was trying to separate issues for parents. You know, number 1 here is this issue with this water, this is what we did, here is what we're doing to manage our water. Well, how do you know that you know on the days that you don't test it that there might not be pollutant?

13:28:14

A:

You know, how do you know your Cincinnati water might not be. Um, the answer to parents you know by this time we established relations and we tried to have some factual information that to the best of our knowledge nothing, nothing is contaminating in the air. We have this early alert system in place, we wore beepers if there was something at the plant, what we were to do.

13:28:41

A:

We had identified sites where campers could go during the summer, afterward would be a leak, or some kind of issue that we were notified about. Um, I mentioned they put in the siren that was there and uh, um, we used that as another way. But again, that still didn't answer the, well what happens if it goes off, what's going to happen.

13:29:13

A:

And, I didn't know that.

TAPE FLHP0062

14:01:17

Q:

Uh, so how did you feel on a personal basis, are we hearing that? (Hold on just a second)

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

14:01:27

Q:

OK. How did you personally feel knowing that um with the water supply so unsure, now that you knew what Fernald did after 1984, having taken your family to the site?

A:

Denial was still _____. Um, probably wasn't until the bitter end that I that I began to kind of wonder a little bit. Um, camps are emotional experiences and you get emotionally wrapped up in the camp and when your life, your family, your friends, and everything that you were about, and your employment was all kind of wrapped up in that, um, I never really stop to think of the negative.

14:02:35

A:

Um, I think today I've adopted a philosophy of don't look back. Who knows, the same thing, who knows day to day the quality of Cincinnati water. I ain't going to trust it implicitly. Um, but you know um, not real sure, you know because I knew we were doing so many testings and that, that I was still, I was comfortable with my decision to be there.

14:03:14

A:

You know, you grow older you grow wiser. Do you second guess yourself? I don't know that ever really have as much as I could have but um, I, I really don't believe that anything that happened at Fernald during my watch, or my time at the camp, really affected the camp environmentally adversely. The reality of that was though that I couldn't guarantee that it wouldn't ever. And that's going back even to your last question of how did you find yourself in these things.

14:03:54

A:

While I could say what I believe today was factual, I couldn't guarantee what might be tomorrow. You know, if someone had a family cancer gene, could the exposure to a even a modest amount of radiation that might be out there do something, or negatively impact. Those questions I couldn't answer. Um, and so I think by the time we closed I had done everything I think within my power to be as ethically honest as I could be and to be as um up front as I could be with people.

14:04:43

A:

And, at the same time when the decision at least to mothball it and put it, I could live with that decision. Uh, it had to be made at that point in time. So, (phone ringing) I guess we have to give a moment for.

14:05:00

Q:

So what happened to the camp after 1988?

A:

Um, as I mentioned it closed in June of '89, in May of '89 we had a closing ceremony. Um, somewhat of an emotional experience. Actually I have to step back a little bit and um in February of '89 I had my

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third child so I'm not only dealing with closing this institution that's been part of my life as I mentioned earlier. Having a third child you know your kind of looking at the handwriting on the wall and going gosh I'm not going to have a job here.

14:05:48

A:

Um, worked through until April, time came to an end. In May they had a closing celebration at the camp site. In June they had a large auction of all of the goods. And there was somewhere in between December and March that the decision had moved from one of temporary closing to permanent closure and even at that point in time folks weren't really saying it was permanent, but we're going to sell off all these goods.

14:06:25

A:

And I was selling beds and mattresses, we were liquidating, we were selling it to other camps. We had a bicycle program by this time, we were selling bicycles and helmets and we had a really neat programs that we were developing. Uh, and had an auction at the property and in June, I chose not to bother, to attend that wasn't something that sounded too fun to me.

14:06:52

A:

I wish I had because they sold all the pews out of the chapel. I have a spot right there that I could use that today in but that's OK. So if anybody ever watches this and they got a pew to sell I'll be glad to entertain it, entertain the thought. Anyhow, um, the maintenance director who lived on the property for several years then (loud noise).

14:07:24

Q:

Um, we were talking about the last days of camp and um, tell us again just about the uh, the day that you found out that they were going to definitely close the camp for good, how did you feel?

A:

Um, well I was, (I get one more).

14:07:59

A:

Um, sad, I mean it was just devastated and I was part of the decision making process. Um, and then that's exactly what it was, it was consensus building process with a group of folks where we were trying to come to some resolution with what we could live with. Um, knowing again as I'd said earlier, that I thought that I had tried to everything that I thought was ethically based as possible, based on the information that I knew.

14:08:35

A:

I also knew it was the right decision. But I also knew that right decision had far reaching impact on lots of people and I also knew in that lots of people it was going to touch, I was going to be the one the fact, it was not just the end of a way of life if I had chosen to leave the position and go somewhere else. It was then end of a , and didn't be able to go back for a variety of functions or send my children there, it was the end of a way of life that we enjoyed.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
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14:09:20

A:

It wasn't like I said, without it's challenges, but um, um, so I you know, the hardest part of that day is that I couldn't say anything to anybody because we had made it they it was a gag meeting, wasn't a gag meeting, but basically we had said we weren't going to say anything. It was December the 8th of 1988, several weeks before Christmas. Like I said, I already knew I had a child coming in February.

14:10:00

A:

Uh, you know right before the holidays and so what we did was went into a tactical plan of now what were we going to do to announce this closing to the public. The same time that I knew it was closed I had people calling up wanting to order gift certificates to give their children for Christmas presents. And saying, you know, I'm going to send you this but I'm not going to take your money. You need to know that we're in a consultation decision making process.

14:10:30

A:

So you know make sure that you have some backup arrangements. As, as we put a mailing together using a public relations firm, we put a mailing letter together and a mailing to be mailed December 26th of that year and if these dates are not exact they're right in there, but it was like right after Christmas, no take that back, it was going to be mailed December 24th.

14:10:55

A:

And you know for several days we had a camper list of four or five thousand names and an alumni list of six or seven thousand names. So we put this together ourselves, in house, about three or four or five people working so that it was as secretive as possible. And no more than that thing was done, I began to have, I mean now your talking 2 days before Christmas, somebody leaked it and had the Enquirer calling and newspapers calling, or televisions calling wanting to know what the story was.

14:11:33

A:

Um, what was going to happen. Because mine was the visible name attached to the entity at that point in time. So you know there I am now dealing with and I really couldn't say anything because I was not designated the official spokesperson. So I couldn't say anything. Um, you know I'm trying to protect again the integrity of the process. Um, and some people can be real relentless when they want a story.

14:12:03

A:

And so I had to watch that over Christmas holidays, this kind of it's been reported that. Knowing that's it's factual and knowing that on December 26th or 27th people are going to be getting this mail announcing this and again you know, I've just put myself out with work. Frustrated, sad, powerless.

14:12:30

A:

Absolutely, totally out of my control by that point in time things were so out of my control that I had to step back and take the emotional issue out of it and say I did nothing, I did nothing to cause this.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

It wasn't my, that's hard, that's hard. It's hard to take yourself out of something you're so emotionally attached to.

14:12:52

Q:

When the decision was announced, um, was it announced in conjunction with Fernald?

A:

No. No, um, it was announced by us. I believe that we had to tell some representatives at Fernald what our decision was. We asked them to keep that information confidential. Actually that was the word that I was looking for earlier. Um, and uh, what we let them know. By this time now it was the Westinghouse group in there and it really again they were kind of left holding the bag.

14:13:41

A:

I didn't you know, I didn't feel any animosity to the crew of people that were in there. Uh, I never felt any animosity toward the people who worked in the plant because they were just doing their job. Somewhere along the line things got out of control. And I don't know, as I was trying to say earlier, I don't know if today if anybody really knows how or why but it did.

14:14:07

A:

I think it was just the unknown. People didn't know what the shelf life of some of this stuff might be 40 years later. You know, so it was not in conjunction with them. I believe that they did a release at the same time that they were saddened to see this happen that you know they were doing what they could to restore the integrity of the operation.

14:14:27

A:

I think the operation at that point and time had been into a um, I think it had been into sort of a shut down mode. I don't know that they were processing any more I don't know the exact time but I don't

think they were doing any more processing there. By that time it had been determined that let's get out of this mess. So.

14:14:46

Q:

Can you tell me a little bit about the closing ceremony?

A:

(Tears) Uh, huh. That was a tough one because I had just ended my employment there um, our little guy had been born. You know about life changes and those kinds of things, when that many things happen at one time. It was real emotional. Um, it was a Saturday afternoon and as we did so many things out there we had a mass a liturgy with it. Um, because you know I you know, because whatever had occurred on my watch I guess at that point and time I guess I was still feeling a sense of obligation.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
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14:15:51

A:

You uh, it was just, you know we did that and then we did a ceremony oh, have a flag lowering and that was. A gentleman we were talking about that was my co-counselor my senior cabin and I did that. That was kind of hard, it was um, probably one of the more emotional things I have in my adult things I've had in my life.

14:16:22

A:

I knew it was the end of an institution and an end of an era. Um, not just for me, I never, never looked at this place for me at all, it was it was always someone else's. I think I said earlier on before we even talked, I worked there for 15 years and felt like I was one of the new people around because it had had you know parents and grandparents and great grandparents of people who had camped there.

14:16:50

A:

Um, felt more for the young folks who were going to have the opportunity to um to be there. It just, the setting, I have been to a lot of camps and the setting is probably just is one of the, one of the neatest settings. Somebody told me one time the air just smells different here. And uh, I think maybe they were right.

14:17:20

A:

It just had a sense about it that drew people back. And one of the last summer camp directors that I had was an older fellow whose father had been one of the first camp directors and had spent some time in his youth there. So you know to watch him come back and spend the summer there after he had been there as a little guy was you know.

14:17:43

A:

Had an interesting, a met a just a neighbor several months ago who had never been a counselor there but her father had been the camp director there so she, I believe was what she said and she'd had lived out there several summers like my kids did and there she is coming back you know this many years later to do some things with some folks.

14:18:01

A:

So that was, the closing was emotional. By that time we knew it was closed, it wasn't mothballed. If it hadn't been announced I knew in my heart it was because of the sales, the consummation of the sales and I knew it was the end of that institution. The children's opportunity to participate in that institution.

14:18:28

A:

And that again was my major concern because I had seen so many, heck we had homes that so many campers that so many kids came through there and just loved the experience. And uh, believe it or not with all the fun that was always my first you know were those kids.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
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14:18:45

Q:

Now you visited the camp (Cameraman - Can we stop for just a second?) Sure.

14:18:52

Q:

So you've been back to the camp 11 years ago, can you tell me about that experience?

A:

Yeah, after it closed I had been out a couple more times when, when the Archdiocese still owned the property and a maintenance director friend of mine, Ed Shannon had lived out there still. And uh, then when it was sold he was asked to leave the property obviously and 2 years ago I think it was like in October of 1997 we had had a reunion of folks.

14:19:35

A:

And had a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the camp. And it was interesting because there were three hundred and something folks that _____ seminary out on Beechmont Avenue from all over the country they came together. People who had worked there in the '30's and '40's and the '50's and all eras and it was really neat to see them.

14:19:53

A:

And then they announced that anybody who had wanted to they could visit Fort Scott the next day. And um, so went, and I'm glad that I did because it isn't, you know it put closure to it. Uh, the gentleman who owns it now has his own uses for it. They've done things, not that any of the buildings are down or anything, all the buildings are still there.

14:20:20

A:

But it put a sense of closure that I don't need to go, I don't need to go back to have the great memories. Um, yeah it was a great property um, but more than the property were the friendships and the relationships that had been made through the years. And uh, I uh, that was probably a pretty good day. It was interesting that we were walking through the, there must have been 150 people there and it was a rainy day and we were kind of wandering through the camp and for whatever reason this guy drives his truck right up to me and goes are you in charge here?

14:20:58

A:

I hadn't been in charge here in 10 years is what I told him but uh, he knew my name and he knew who I was um and uh, they were just concerned because they thought, 'cause he said they thought four or five sisters nuns were going to come out and walk through the camp we didn't realize there would be 150 people or 200 people and families and we took children.

14:21:24

A:

And again, you know um, went back the smells were the same, some of the sites were the same, some of them had changed but um, I don't need to go back now to have the visual memories of, of the setting. Oh boy (crying, tears) it was great while it lasted. It was a lot of fun. Knew a lot of people, a lot of fun. Outdoor education opportunity, opportunities that just can't get today.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
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14:22:09

A:

I never slopped hogs in my life and as a counselor, I slopped hogs. You were talking about cooking in a camp, yeah, when your kitchen help quits you cooked. And uh, everything that you can think of happens in a family happened. And uh, I appreciate, I think probably looking back I'm honored to have had the opportunity to do it and we gave it the best turn we could.

14:22:40

A:

I don't know that the community, because the community never had a presence they don't know what they lost but a lot was lost and uh you know we go on.

14:22:56

Q:

Is there anything that you'd like to add that we didn't cover?

A:

I think I just pretty much said about as much. Be interesting visual to see. Um, um, no. Memories are great. I think we all cherish them forever.

14:23:25

Q:

Great, well we have pictures to shoot too, so.

A:

Right.

Q:

Thank you so much.

A:

You're welcome.

14:23:32

Q:

Oh, yeah nat sound I forgot about that, you got me going.

A:

Didn't mean to. The closing part, and even going back out that day, you know, it's somebody else's somebody else owns it. That's their space, I respect their privacy.