

NOTICE

This transcript contains a Living History Interview conducted and prepared as part of the Fernald Living History Project. The narrations, descriptions, perceptions, opinions and beliefs expressed in this interview are solely those of the interviewee(s) and are not to be attributed directly or indirectly, to the United States Government, to the U.S. Department of Energy, to Fluor Daniel, Inc., to any Fluor Daniel Fernald teaming partner company, to any of their officers or employees, to the Fernald Living History Project or to anyone associated with the Fernald Living History Project.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

Name: Carl Summe

Date Interviewed: 7/22/99

Date Transcribed: 10/25/99

Tape: 58

Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP 132

16:01:03

Q:

Okay. The first thing we do is ask for your name. If you could just give us your name and spell it so we have it correctly.

16:01:07

A:

Carl Summe, C-A-R-L S-U-M-M-E.

16:01:13

Q:

Great. I guess we usually start with a little background, how long have you been in the area, when did you get here, a little bit about your family.

16:01:18

A:

I've lived here since '71, I was born and raised in Mount Healthy. Dated my wife for several years who lived across from the plant on the other side of the river and we bought this farm in '71 and here we are.

16:01:36

Q:

Great. So um, what exactly do you raise here?

16:01:41

A:

Corn, wheat, soybeans, hay and feed it to our dairy cows.

16:01:44

Q:

And how many acres do you have?

16:01:46

A:

There's 112 on this, on this side of the river.

16:01:50

Q:

Great, great, and um, when you first moved here what were your first impressions of the plant?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

16:01:57

A:

Well, I'd been around the plant for several years before I moved here with my wife's family and I don't know, just never really thought that much about it.

16:02:09

Q:

What purpose did you think it served?

16:02:12

A:

Well, we knew it made some component to the bomb. I guess, I think we were always told or heard it, that there was like 12 stages to making the bomb and it made one of the stages.

16:02:28

Q:

And living so close to the plant what kind of things did you worry about.

16:02:33

A:

When?

Q:

Well after you knew what it did.

16:02:37

A:

After we knew, we were worried about a lot of things. Um, I guess our health and the health of our children.

16:02:46

Q:

Are you involved in public meetings at all? Do you go in and deal with that at all?

16:02:50

A:

No.

16:02:51

Q:

And, um, what kinds of myths or legends have you heard about the plant?

16:02:57

A:

All kinds of things about the plant. Just talk to anybody from around here or watch TV. It's been on *Unsolved Mysteries*.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

16:03:13

Q:

What was your impression of that whole story?

16:03:13

A:

Well, I can't say that I disbelieve it but a lot went on, we don't know, why should we, I guess I would consider anything anybody told me.

16:03:30

Q:

That it could be true?

16:03:32

A:

Oh, I'd say so. What'd you think?

16:03:34

Q:

Well it's kind of interesting because we talked to the guy who was the coroner, um and they sent all the salt from the salt vat, supposedly the guy disappeared, to him, to analyze. And they did a whole bunch of analysis and they found a whole lot of little pieces of metal that they thought may have been in the eyelets of his shoes, but nothing to say absolutely, you know, that he threw himself in there.

16:04:00

A:

Of course, you can go on and hear even more rumors that go further that he threw himself in (laughing).

16:04:08

Q:

That's for sure (laughing). Um, you mentioned hot spots. What are your concerns? What has happened in the past? I've only been in this area for the last five years or so. Can you tell us about that?

16:04:17

A:

Sure, it um, we own of course you know the adjoining farm to the plant and um, they found a hot spot on the fence line adjoining ours and um, a fence, as you know, is just a piece of wire and anything that landed right against the fence could have went through the fence and we more than likely there are hot spots on our side of the fence too.

16:04:45

A:

But, there's not much of an effort to find them. They're going to sample our ground, but I think out of 80 or 90 acres, they're going to sample I think seven spots, so seven round little inch spots on a hundred acres or 90 acres is where they're going to look for hot spots.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

16:05:04

Q:

So tell us a little bit about the land that you have adjoining the plant, um, who did it belong to before. Do you rent it from Fernald or how does that work?

16:05:11

A:

The ground adjoining the plant, I guess the Ceilie Mingus Farm, what we called it I guess was Carl Mingus, was her husband's originally but we bought it from Ceilie and it adjoins the plant from 126 back probably, I don't know a half to a third the length of the plant. Just a straight shot, put a notch in it along side of it would be the east side of the plant.

16:05:40

Q:

And what do you mostly do with that land?

16:05:44

A:

Uh, the front section we keep cattle on, keep our young replacement heifers on, or some of 'em. And then, the tillable ground we raise corn, soybeans on and hay on.

Q:

Do you ever have to get milk tested or any of the produce tested? Or have you had to do that in the past?

A:

We never *had* to do anything. They've come and asked us to sign release forms in past years and we've always signed the release forms and let 'em do whatever they wanted to do.

16:06:12

Q:

Do you ever have any concerns for your livestock being so close to the plant or anything?

A:

Not really, I imagine this is a slow process, that I think of cancer as being a slow death, and if livestock were to get it, you know, their life cycle is so short, just like the deer or the rabbits that run on the plant or anything else, probably by the time it, it would take to affect 'em, I would imagine it would take longer than their normal life span.

16:06:41

Q:

Tell us about having to deal with the government. What's that like?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

A:

Well, over the years, we've had a lot o' contact with a lot o' people at the plant, and ninety-nine percent of them are super nice people. I mean, just like you, they're just all smiles, happy, nice, talk to ya like a gentleman. But now, how, where it goes after that, I don't know, (chuckling) but super nice people.

16:07:09

Q:

Have you ever had any problems with having your property so close to Fernald as far as just dealing with, with the folks on the other side?

A:

Oh, we've had a lot o' promises over the years, uh, fix tiles or fix this or fix that. You know, you meet with somebody and, "Yeah, sure. Fine, why not?" (Chuckling) That's usually as far as it goes. But, you know, we, we've always had a good relationship with the people at the plant.

16:07:38

Q:

Good, good. And um, let's see, um. What kind of contact did you have with plant workers or do you have with plant workers now?

A:

Oh, over the years, we've knew a lot o' plant workers, just from bein' there, uh, you know we had the cattle on site and so we knew a lot o' the guards. We'd feed in the evening, we'd you know, there's guards at night that you say "Hi" to, you get to be friends with. Talk to just because they do their job, they come over and stop and say, "Hey, who are you?" or something like, you know what I mean.

16:08:14

A:

Just because we're there, you know, it gets dark early and we might not get there until 6:30 or 7 o'clock at night to do the feedin', and it's dark. And they come up and said, "Hi." I'd say over the last thirty years, you know, we've knew a world o' guards, probably more guards than, than anybody else.

16:08:30

A:

But then there's a lot o' people in the area that ya, you know through church and that, that work there. And, or just happen to run into, and they say, "Where are you from?" You say "Shandon." "Oh, I work there" you know. But, yeah, we've knew a lot o' people that worked there.

16:08:45

Q:

And down through the years, your contact with the site workers, what kinds of things have they told you about the plant?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

A:

Well, oh, just everything from “great place to work” (chuckling) to “terrible.” I mean one guy comes to mind, uh, I don’t know what timeframe it was, but he tried to tell me his job was uh, goin’ out with a five gallon bucket and pickin’ up the dead birds (laughing) in the morning (laughs). So I don’t know if there is any truth to that or not. But uh, oh, just, a lot o’ people had a awful nice job there over the years.

16:09:24

Q:

Now at about 1984 to ’86, there were a number of dust collector releases in Plant 9. And um, they made it kind of public, and of course there was a lot o’ media attention. Living here then, how did you react to that situation?

A:

I guess I really didn’t react or overreact. I mean, you read it in the paper, and I don’t know, you just, I guess, I guess I just didn’t know, or. Lookin’ back, I guess I should of reacted, but at the time, I guess I didn’t, get involved or do anything.

16:10:10

Q:

Since then, how do you feel about that situation?

A:

Well, I think the whole thing was a bad situation. Looking back, you know, I mean, now that we’re, we’re told how harmful it is, and releases come out in the paper how much more likely we are to get cancer, and I think it’s a real bad deal now. But you know hindsight is 20-20 I guess.

16:10:35

Q:

And knowing what you know now, how do you feel about the government?

A:

Well, (laughs) you know if, if it’s true what ya hear about then I guess it is. The research they were doin’ on people (laughs). I mean, and everything. Yet, I’m sure they did anything they wanted to, and somebody probably justified it in their mind, but I don’t know if you could get the people around here to justify it in their mind.

16:11:06

Q:

Some o’ the bitterness that people in this area feel, um, what’re some o’ the reasons for that bitterness?

A:

Well, can you blame ‘em? I mean, when you hear in the paper that people were bein’ used for human guinea pigs down at U.C., and you know, I mean that’s just what came out. I’m sure there’s a lot o’ other stuff that never will come out. You know, I mean, don’t you think they have a right to be bitter? You, you’re noddin’ your head, (laughing) you’re not answerin’ me (laughs).

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

16:11:35

Q:

Only because o' the mic (both laugh). Usually I just stay silent so whatever you have to say is on, on tape. But that's, um, yeah, I mean. Uh, who, other neighbors of yours, uh that live in this area, how do they feel about the plant?

A:

Well, I don't know of anybody that's real happy that it's there now. But um, I think it's been a real detriment to us as far as the evaluation of our properties. The health risk, um, I can't see any advantage to it, bein' a farmer. You know, I mean if you were workin' there and you know, that was your, your in-, your livelihood then maybe it was an advantage to you. But bein' a farmer in the area, I don't see where it's an advantage to the farmers.

16:12:27

Q:

Tell us a little bit about the property value. Um, did it go down after, in 1986, or how did they evaluate that?

A:

How did who evaluate it?

Q:

Um, was there somebody that evaluated the property values around here after that all happened?

Q:

Oh, I don't know if somebody did or not, um, are you talkin' about like when they had the devaluation for the. (Comment: Um-hmm.) Well, my understanding is they just went by the tax bill. Didn't they, the value was determined as of a certain day the tax bill said your property was worth? I don't know if they went around and re-appraised property. I don't know anything about that.

16:13:09

Q:

Were you part of the class-action suit for area?

A:

Well, not really, uh, well yes. But originally, no. I didn't know anything about it, but at one point, um, we did sign up for the, on the suit, I guess after it was in motion, and we received devaluation on this farm.

16:13:32

Q:

And what kind of processes did you have to go through, once you became part of the suit?

A:

I don't think we did anything (laughing). I guess just sign some papers. I never went to a meeting or nothin'. I just, I don't even, I think my sister-in-law called me and asked me to sign, and I signed, but I wasn't involved in the process. I guess just too busy (chuckles).

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

16:14:00

Q:

How about the emotional distress um, suit that also happened? Um, what kinds of things did you have to do? Were you a part of that first of all?

A:

Yes. We signed up for that. The whole family signed up. I can remember sittin' at the dining room table with my wife and all the kids. The kids were a lot younger then. I remember sittin', helpin' everybody fill out their papers, and laughin'. "What's this mean? What's that mean?" and we all did fill 'em out.

16:14:30

Q:

Was it kind of bureaucratic the stuff you had to go through? A lot o' red tape?

A:

I just remember fillin' that packet out. Gee, that's how many years ago? What year was that, do you remember?

Q:

It was probably '89?

A:

It's been quite a while ago. But uh, yeah we, the whole family filled out the, the questionnaires and sent 'em back in.

16:14:54

Q:

And after you filled out the paperwork, then what other things did ya have to do as a part of that?

A:

I don't know if they called in a certain percentage of the people, but our family was called in. We, we went to I think it was Mercy in Hamilton. And um, had an appointment with, I think mine was a gal from Boston. I remember tellin' me she flew in at nine o'clock and she was leavin' at ten, she had to get back for somethin'. But uh, real nice person. I sat for whatever length of time and answered her questions.

16:15:25

Q:

So it was like a psych-, psychological evaluation.

A:

Right.

Q:

So um, how has the full, Fernald plant affected you and your family's life?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

A:

Well. To be hone-, or to be fair I guess, i-, it's probably helped us in some respects. We leased the pastureland from 'em. And that enabled us to grow as far as, you know, I mean our dairy herd was concerned. We, we raised all our young replacement heifers over there, and it gave us access to, you know, a lot o' pasture for a lot o' years, so in that regard it's been a plus for us.

16:16:09

A:

But on the other hand, if it's hurt our health, nothin's worth, you know I mean, it ain't, it wasn't worth it, if it hurt our health. I don't know that it did. It uh, maybe *they* do, maybe they don't. I don't, you know, I don't know, but like I say it, it was a real plus to us if it didn't hurt us in any way.

16:16:37

Q:

Now your wife lived across the street from the plant, or across the river from the plant?

A:

Across the river from the plant.

Q:

What kind of concerns did she have um, now knowing what was going on over there that she lived so close and grew up so close?

16:16:49

A:

A lot. Her mother died o' cancer, her dad died o' cancer. Her sisters had problems; she's had thyroid problems. Her family's had a lot o' problems. Uh, now whether they'd a had problems if they lived in Michigan or someplace else, I don't know. But uh, it's a real coincidence I guess. Their neighbor, he died o' cancer. I just heard now that another neighbor, young guy in his 40's has cancer.

16:17:22

A:

So, it's funny everybody that lives right there in that little pocket has cancer, but maybe that's the same as other places, parts of the country, too. I don't know.

Q:

Um, are you aware of the FRESH organization?

A:

What I read about 'em in the paper.

Q:

Are you involved with, or is your wife involved with FRESH at all?

A:

No.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

16:17:48

Q:

Um, what're your impressions of the work that's going on at Fernald right now?

A:

Costly (chuckles) I don't know how the layperson qualified to know or understand what's goin' on.

Q:

Well, your personal impression of it. Have you ever gone on a tour of the site or anything?

16:18:07

A:

I don't know, I been, (begins laughing) yeah, a lot o' tours. Every time a cow got out or fix a fence (laughing). Yeah, we, you know, our whole family, my, my wife mowed, before, where, we call 'em the Christmas trees, but where all the evergreens are on 126? Her father had a contract to keep that mowed. She, her and her sisters mowed that every week for several years.

16:18:31

A:

And we spend a lot o' time at the plant. Our kids, we put 'em in a pumpkin seat and sit 'em under a shade tree when we're checkin' the cows and just anyway, we've spent a lot o' time over in around the plant.

Q:

Wow. Do you worry uh, about health effects for your children since they were so close?

A:

Oh, sure. You know, I mean, like I say, it, if the releases cause, excuse me, (talks to someone off camera) What's the matter?

(Tape stops and resumes)

16:19:10

Q:

As far as Fernald goes, do you think that the government is making good use of taxpayer money?

A:

Oh, I think it's probably like anything the government does. There's a world o' waste. It uh, you know, farmers're used to doin' things a lot different than (chuckling) a lot more economical than the, what the government does it.

16:19:36

Q:

And uh, generally, how do you feel about living in such close proximity to Fernald?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

A:

Well, I'd rather it hadn't happened. You know, if I'd had my rathers, I'd rather that the plant wasn't there, but you know. What're you gonna do at this point in the game?

Q:

Now they are tearing buildings down at Fernald. Pretty quickly. As quickly I guess as can be expected (both laugh).

A:

Yeah, how many years, thus far?

16:20:06

Q:

And uh, some day that plant is not gonna be there. What would you like to see be done with the land once the plant is gone?

A:

I don't know. They've already given me a pretty monument to live with I guess. They built; they're buildin' the nuclear cell right up against my line. The law says I gotta stay away three hundred feet, so three hundred feet, they're gonna go up what, seventy feet and build this nice pyramid and sit it right next to me?

A:

So I guess what difference does it make to ask me what opinion or what rathers or say I have in it to, nobody asked me if they could put the cell right next to me.

16:20:48

Q:

What're your impressions of that cell? What it, what's it for, and what're they gonna be doing with it?

A:

Well, it's the cheapest way they could do to get rid of the, what was there. Takin' all them buildings and everything and puttin' it on a big pile and coverin' it up with dirt. Which could haunt us in the future. They could of took all that metal and cleaned it like they did in the past, and recycled it.

16:21:09

A:

The average person I don't imagine knows it, all that stuff could be recycled, but they don't wanna, wanna do that so they're takin' all that steel and puttin' it on a pile and coverin' it up when it should of been recycled. Then the pile wouldn't a had to been near as big or wouldn't a been there forever to haunt us.

16:21:27

Q:

How do you feel about not having a say in that whole uh, I guess that whole decision process?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

A:

Well, I guess I voiced that to somebody once, and they said that was my fault for not goin' to public meetings and voicin' my opinion, but I imagine that was, I've always felt like that was a waste. You know, but.

16:21:51

Q:

So when you go to uh, to your pastureland now, and you look over the fence and you see what's goin' on at Fernald, lots of machines moving around and stuff like that, uh, what're your impressions of what's going on, the way they're digging up the land and those kinds of things?

16:22:07

A:

Probably, well one thing that kind of related to that I guess, is, bothers me I think it's a waste. The three hundred feet that they have between their, their cell and me, they're building snake pits and turtle pits and, the wetlands they call 'em. They're fillin' it with rock acid, the snakes and turtles and everything can live there, but when they build 'em right on the line, I don't know they expect 'em to live on their side o' the fence.

16:22:36

A:

I don't know why they're treatin' me so nice and givin' me all this wildlife to eat my crops, but there again, I wasn't asked.

Q:

Is that a concern with the wetlands so close? See I, I, I don't really know what's goin' on in that, I mean I drive by and I go, "What're they doin'?" but I'm not.

16:22:53

A:

Well, they have what, a thousand fifty acres? And uh, they went right on the, right on 126, right on the main highway, and my property and build a wetland to attract the wildlife. Well, anybody knows, that the deer have caused I don't know how many accidents.

16:23:09

A:

One lady was killed right in that area from deer crossin' the road, and here they are attractin' 'em right up to the highway, puttin' this wetland to feed the wildlife and attract 'em right against the highway. Don't look smart to me, but what do I know?

16:23:26

Q:

Let's talk a little bit about water issues. Um, Fernald of course, sits right on a major aquifer. (Comment: Right.) And uh, what kind of, how have those water issues touched your life at all, and in what ways?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

A:

Well, I don't know how it touches me, we, we have city water here. Our water supposedly comes from above the plant, but I don't, I don't know, I just, I don't know. I mean, obviously they're contaminatin' the aquifer, who it's affectin', I don't know, I guess it should concern me whether you know I mean, regardless of who it's affectin'.

16:24:05

A:

But like, like you say, they're sit right over the aquifer and they're puttin' this nuclear cell right over top of it too. Makes a lot o' sense, don't it? Hm, they put a, a leachate system underneath it and it leaked before they ever start it, so, what's that tell you. The cells gonna be there for how many, thousands of years and they didn't even get it right before they started the, they had leaks before they ever started it so. Yeah it should be a big concern to everybody around here.

16:24:36

Q:

Do you worry that your livestock is so close to ah, that's aquifer that maybe contaminated?

A:

No, well the aquifer is underground and the livestock are above ground so I don't.

Q:

But do you have a well in that area that you use for water for your livestock?

A:

We have springs that come out of the plant, and now they've put the wetlands in they've kind of rerouted and channeled the water and ah, they claim we'll still get the same amount of runoff in the future and I guess we will, I don't know. It is a concern as far as us having water. They've told us that ah, we'll always have water, now I don't know where that's at in writing or who will remember that down if there is a problem down the road. But they told us they wouldn't disrupt our water.

16:25:33

Q:

And how do you feel about the public water supply that they put in?

A:

Well, it didn't, it wasn't available to us, um, I guess it was all on the um, it would be the south side of the plant, where we're on the northeast side of the plant. We ah, we wanted water for our cattle, but ah, we were denied.

Q:

And what kind of process did you have to go through to try to get that particular water put in?

16:26:07

A:

We just called at that time. They had a number, I don't know whether it was in the paper or when all that was going on several years ago and we called and ah, whoever we talked to on the phone told us,

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

asked us our, where we were at and everything and they said we didn't lay directly in the south plume or where ever the water was being made available, so we didn't qualify. But we're still getting (chuckles) runoff from the plant to water our cattle with.

16:26:35

Q:

Have you ever witnessed someone coming over and taking samples from your land?

A:

I don't know truthfully if I witnessed them doing that, but I've signed a lot of releases years ago. I mean, I'm confident that there were samples taken in the past.

Q:

Do you have any idea what the process is when they go do that or have you ever asked or anything like that?

16:26:58

A:

Not really.

Q:

I'm, I ask you that 'cause a lady said that they came to sample her well and they were wearing full anti-C's and gloves and full-face respirators and she says, well we've been drinking that water for 10 years.

A:

No I find, I find that hard to believe.

16:27:15

Q:

Makes sense then, okay, um, let's see.

(Cameraperson: Got about 3 minutes on this tape)

Q:

Okay. Is there anything that we didn't cover that you wanted to cover? Any thing that you wanted to say and didn't get a chance because I didn't ask the right question or?

A:

Not really. I just, I imagine at one point in time some governor fought to get the plant for Ohio. He thought he was probably bringing lots of jobs to the area, but it, in which it did. But I wish he wouldn't have succeeded (chuckles). You know what can you say looking back. We'd have been a lot better off if it hadn't of lit here, but, but is it true, I don't know. Was this their second choice, someone told me once that this was suppose to go to Louisville or Lexington and they had the foresight not to let them come?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

Q:

Um, actually the story that I've heard is that they evaluated a number of sites in the whole country and like they went all over the place looking and, and Fernald actually was the number one plant, ah, number one place to put the plant. Because of the level ground and the proximity to a large city, they knew they could get a lot of people in for the work force. And also they evaluated the fact that it was kind of a secluded area. That it wasn't a really highly populated area in this area, (Comment: Probably) that's one of the reasons they looked at it.

A:

Probably because it was sitting over a aquifer and they had plenty of water.

Q:

That's exactly right they needed a lot of water for the process.

A:

And they had a river to discharge it in, that they could monitor and blend in what they wanted to get rid of. That's one thing that I guess I could mention. It ah, we always saw the men sitting on the bridge at Miamitown and at Ross every so many hours whatever their schedule was, with a can, dippin' water out of the river below and above, above the plant.

16:29:22

A:

And ah, I think ah, looking back and talking to people now, that was so they could blend in what they wanted too, their discharge, they blended it into the river and sent it on down the stream. So I, I think there was a lot went on that ah, even at the time people knew wasn't quite right.

Q:

Anything else that you can think of?

A:

Not really.

Q:

You want to run nat sound?

(Cameraperson: um-hm)

16:29:55

Q:

We're gonna do something called nat sound. If we could just have quiet for a minute, we just get sort of the tone of the area. This is nat sound.