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Transcript

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00:00:26

Why don't you tell me a little bit about when you started working at or near the Fernald site?

00:00:35

At or near? I began with the George Fuller Company; it's the construction company. And I started there in May of 1951. I worked there for about a year and then I transferred over to the Atomic energy Commission, which was on site. I worked there for about four and a half years. Then I went to Proctor & Gamble.

00:01:02

Can you tell me about your first office?

00:01:04

My first office? Well it was quite different then a typical office. We were in a renovated chicken house. And before we could move into it they had to clean it out or fumigate it, or whatever you have to do to get rid of all the bugs and things. But it was quite large, and there was a boss and two secretaries or clerks in there. And we had all of our file equipment in there. And we were in the receiving department. And when the trucks would come with the material - they'd bring in the _____. And we'd check them in and get all of the paper work ready so they could be billed. And that was quite an interesting place.

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We also had an airplane that flew in right at the side of it. They had their own private airplane that went down to the airport and picked up packages and things like that. And so we became friendly with the pilots. And one day he said, "Why don't you bring your lunch and you can just fly over with it?" So the other lady and I packed our lunch and hopped in the plane and we flew over to Cincinnati Airport and we picked up some packages and then flew back. And it was about a day or two later that the _____ came down and said there would be no passengers on the airplane. I guess we stared it and ended it (laughing).

00:02:30

But it was a different type of job then. I was only in my twenties. And this was brand new stuff.

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How did this switch over happen?

00:02:44

Please?

00:02:47

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When you switched jobs from George Fuller?

00:02:48

Well, I knew that George Fuller was not going to be long-term there. They were building all the things and that. Then the opportunity came up, a friend told me that they were hiring at the Atomic Energy Commission. And I went there and took my test – I did not have to take a civil service test, which was... I thought I'd have to, but I didn't. They hired me, so I just went from one side of the place to the other side. It was a good move because receiving was going down and there wasn't as much coming in as there used to be. So it was a good move.

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How did your job duties change?

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Well I began to work for a chemical engineer. And in high school I had started chemistry and I didn't like it. I didn't like all this terminology. And for the balance in my life I worked for Atomic energy and I worked for these engineers. Some chemical, some others. I thought, "You really messed up in high school. You shouldn't of taken chemistry."

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He was the chief chemical engineer for the site. And he was out on the project a lot; making sure everything was going right. And then after I worked for him for about a year or so, then the lady who was the area manager was leaving to go to California. And so they let me interview for that, and I became the secretary for the area manager. That was the top job at that point. There was no place else to go, you know? I worked for him probably for about three years. I enjoyed... of course I enjoyed all of my jobs. I just enjoyed that type of work. And I got to meet a lot of people. I was impressed with a lot of the things... I guess I was not aware that there was so much thoroughness of security and things like that until I became involved with the Atomic Energy Commission.

00:05:17

If you didn't have your badge, you couldn't go to work. And you got stopped at all the different places. And so things were secure. It was a good job.

00:05:31

Can you describe a typical day at work?

00:05:34

I don't think anyone can have a typical day in an office like this. I worked in offices for forty-some years, I don't know if there was a typical day. But you know, you go in, in the morning and most of the time you start off with a cup of coffee, chit-chat with everybody, and if the mail came in, you prepared the mail for the boss. And we would always try to put up all the back-up information and pull it together. And after a while you'd go in and take some short-hand. I took a lot of shorthand back then. The skills now have escaped quite a bit.

00:06:15

It was fun at the time. And did a lot of typing. Back then we had a Teletype machine. And it was a novelty for me; I've never seen one before. A lady ran it, and she had her own little room. And they

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asked me if I would like to learn that. And so that became a challenge, and I learned the Teletype machine. So if it went off, and she wasn't nearby, I could go in and take care of that too. So that was an added responsibility. I liked it all right except when they came in coded. I wasn't too keen... a lot of the messages came in coded message. And you'd run the message through a decoder.

00:07:05

But that was a fun type too. Then it also allowed me... when they had some disaster times... to be brought in for the evening hours. I knew how to run the Teletype machine. But I had opportunities to do different things when I worked for both Fuller and the AEC.

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Can you tell us a little more about the disasters?

00:07:35

I don't remember too much what they were doing. I know that everyone was on alert, and if some city was bombed or if something drastic happened... I know our unit was to be moved to a secret place. And the only communication was the Teletype during those things. And most of the time, we had like 24-hour of it. And the place just like on a 24-hour basis, we took our shifts and that. And we did just regular work, or if something came up that said we needed to do it, that's what we did. They did prepare us. They were prepared for any emergencies.

00:08:37

You talked a lot about security, what kinds of security issues were you involved with? I guess what I'm asking is, is there a lot of security issues you can share?

00:09:00

Oh yes, I shared very little with my family or friends. It's always been one of my things. Whoever or whatever company I worked for, everything was between that company and myself. And only if it was public knowledge did I ever share. My husband and I never shared what was going on. In fact at the time I was hired over there, I didn't even know what was going on. You know, I was hired for the construction that was building a power plant for the government. At the time, I didn't know what they were doing. And then all of the sudden, it became known as the Atomic Plant. You automatically... I think most of the old timers around here still calls the place the Atomic Plant.

00:09:48

You can readily put two and two together. The Atomic Plant is doing something with the bombs. Or something to that effect. And so it was my job, working for the area manager I had the knowledge of what was going on. He dealt a lot with the Oak Ridge people, and I had the top secret... the secret classification. Of course he had the top-secret classification and there was some things that he did on his own that I didn't get involved with. We had special cabinets for all of the secret information, and it was logged in or out if it was a secret or confidential paper. We had in and outgoing logs for every single paper that came in while I was there.

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Security was quite strong. We had a security man and a secretary on site; there office was right down from ours. And he was involved with a lot of the things that were going on with the National Lead Company. I can't say that it was not secure from that standpoint. We became attached to our badges as I would always used to say (laughing).

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Was it had for you to not be able to talk about work?

00:11:22

No. No, I kind of liked to leave the job where it is and have other interests when I get home. We were involved in a lot of things. We were young and on the go at the time I worked over there. No, in all my work I have not brought work home with. I have to admit, I brought work home, but I did it myself when I was here.

00:11:58

Did you grow up in this area?

00:12:01

I was born in Hamilton, and went to my first grade in Hamilton. My parents had built a house. My mom's father had given his girls each some land and my mom and dad began to build the house. So I started my second grade at a little one-room school. All eight grades were in it and there was three in my class. And when we would finish our lessons, the teacher would say, "You can go outside now."

00:12:34

And the rest of them would continue their classes. And of course when you're in there with all eight grades, you pick up a lot of what the other classes are doing. And so the three of us were probably developing like third and fourth grade skills all the time because we were right in there with them. And that was a real experience. And then after the second grade, they moved us... they shut down that one-room school.

00:13:12

They had a schoolhouse right up here in New Haven that took the third and fourth... the third and fourth, fifth and sixth. And for seven and eight, I went down to the house, the one down in New Baltimore. Then I graduated from there and then went to Harrison High School. So I've lived here well all my life except for the first seven years. Even when I married, I married a boy from New Haven here, and we've lived in the same area the whole time we been married, about 47 years.

00:13:48

How have things changed?

00:13:49

What used to be a rural community is no longer rural. I think that was the saddest part was years ago seeing the farmland disappear. Typically, all of us were farmers. And all the sudden all this industry came and with industry came more traffic, more people. And in this town, I used to know everybody. And I can't say that now. When I see a person on the street, I think wow that's a stranger, but then I learn that they live just a couple streets over. I'm not out and amongst the people like I used to be.

00:14:51

Let's go back to Fernald. Since you had access to a lot of secure information, did you react differently

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than most community members about the news in 1984 about the contaminated wells?

00:15:12

I had concern back then when it came out. I really couldn't get too excited about it. I never felt any fear from the place, when I worked there or since. I just couldn't picture them not following up on things or doing things that would hurt the environment or causing anyone to have bad will. I guess accidents happen and no one has any control over that. But I was never afraid, I'm still not afraid.

00:16:03

What was the atmosphere like in your office? Was there a lot of people working, and what was it like to work there?

00:16:13

When it was the Atomic Energy Company, there was only 25-30 employees, we had a small group. It was kind of like a family. You grew to know everybody. We had some outside gatherings together and for the families and that. And some of the girls became really good friends. I became really good friends to one of the other ones and I was even in her wedding and things like that. It was a good feeling.

00:16:52

I don't think there was any animosity between anybody. If you were offered a little better job, everyone seemed happy for you, I don't think anyone was doubting you. It was a good atmosphere, a good environment. We were tucked off on the second floor back in the corner. So we didn't have... unless you went out and made contact with other people, you didn't have a lot of contact with other people except in the lunch area or places like that. I enjoyed it.

00:17:26

Where was your office?

00:17:33

Yes. In the Administration Building then at National Lead. It was on the second floor or I would call it the right wing, all the way back to the back. We had the whole back area to ourselves. And we had a file place where we kept all... we had tons and tons of file cabinets it seemed like. And the two people who worked it seemed to be able to pull right away when you just give them a little bit of knowledge, and they were able to pull whatever you needed.

00:18:08

Then we had the administration and we had... (dog barking)... we had the financial man, the engineers, security, and the men had the... there was a woman that was one of the managers in the administration. And most of them had their own office. The girl sat out in this open area. It gave you good comradeship. I enjoyed it. You had to be serious sometimes (laughing), you had to get serious. It seemed like the best thing was when you were having a really good time, and they you'd get the buzz-buzz when the boss wanted you to take dictation. It seemed like they always knew when we were having too good a time.

00:19:13

Did you have any interaction with the people at National Lead?

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00:19:17

Oh, we had some with the different groups we were dealing with. And I am still friends with some of those people. Most all the people that I was close to are all at the age where we're retired now. They're going different ways (dog barking loudly).

00:19:51

Have you been on site since you retired?

00:19:55

Since I stopped working there, I went back one time. It's never the same when you go back when you don't have any affiliation there. And I have not been back... I've driven back there to pick up someone from work or something like that. But I have not visited.

00:20:18

When you visited the site that one time, how had the site changed?

00:20:22

Well it was shortly after I left, so nothing had really changed that much. I'm sure I wouldn't recognize anything back there. When I worked there, I had the opportunity to take a tour of one of the plants. I wore the shoes, the hat and all that. And that was a big thing right then, climbing around on that. But I'm sure I wouldn't... I don't know the different names of the buildings or silos. When I worked there, we didn't have a lot of the silos and things like that. I was there at the very beginning and I left at the end of '56. So it's been a long time.

00:21:08

Where was this renovated chicken house, was it on site?

00:21:13

We were on site, but we were over off 126, where the trucks came in. They had made a driveway to you know bring the supplies in. And we were right as they came down the little _____. The receiving department was right there, and they would all stop and bring in their things. We'd process them through, then they'd go have them removed. But you can imagine that there were a lot of trucks in and out in the early construction days. So that was a busy office, very busy.

00:22:05

When Jim Innis approached you about the Fernald Living History Project, what was your reaction?

00:22:10

My first reaction... he'd asked me if I heard about it, and I said no I haven't, he filled me in a little bit, and he asked me if I had any interest in it, and I said oh I don't have any time to do anything more. I said, that's a long time ago you know, it's kind of hard to remember a lot of that. And then he told me that other people told him that I had been one of the first people on this site and things like that. I said if I can be of help I'll give it a whirl. So after I told him that I would do it, I came home and told my

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husband, "I don't know why I did that." Then I began to worry... that's too long ago, I won't remember. But if you give it a jog now and then and it's kind of funny as you see different people, they automatically trigger something.

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So it's been kind of fun for me to relive some of that time that I had actually stored away in a memory that hasn't been pulled out for a long time. But for me it was a good job at both places. I remember when a girlfriend approached me and said that construction was starting over there, why don't you interview and get hired on. And I thought no, I think I'm okay where I am. Then she told me they paid better over there. So at twenty I thought this is the main purpose of a job so. And so I interviewed for that. And when I went from Fuller to the Atomic Energy Commission, they paid a little bit better, and I thought this was great.

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Back then, money was the key thing to the moves so... and the older you get, the job means a little bit more. And there are some other attributes you take into consideration; I doubt that I did back then. We were just married and needed money.

00:24:22

What is your idea... what did Jim explain to you about the Living History Project, what do you think of when you hear Fernald Living History Project?

00:24:32

Well after I thought about it after he talked about it, I think it's really a good thing because years from now, there will still be a lot of stories going around about Fernald. And no matter what they do with the property over there... and it will be a good resource to pull up what people... who lived and worked there did. And didn't have really any adverse reaction to the place. It's not all bad; a lot of bad things have come out about it. I think this history will be good. And I understand they're going to interview numerous people, and log a lot of memories. And history, no matter what it's on is interesting.

00:25:50

Is there anything we didn't cover that you would like to talk about?

00:25:55

Not really, no.