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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

Name: Don Gieringer

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Tape: #81

Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP0186

03:01:04

Q:

Uh, first of all if you could just give us your name and spell it to make sure we have it right.

A:

All right. It's Don Gieringer. G-I-E-R-I-N-G-E-R.

03:01:13

Q:

And if you could just give us a little background. Uh, where you were born, where did you go to school, how did you come into the uh, uh Fernald area?

A:

Well this part of Ohio has been home my entire life. I was born and raised in, I was born in Cincinnati and raised in Harrison, Ohio which is on the Indiana border. And uh, went to school, Harrison High School and uh, I've just been here every since.

03:01:38

Q:

And can you tell us uh, how you came to own property close to Fernald?

A:

It was through marriage, first marriage. Uh, the property actually that I live on actually belonged to my ex-mother and father in-law and they gave us about an acre of land to build a house on that I am now living in. And uh, I have lived in that particular area since 1958. Uh, probably in the house, my own house since 1959. And uh, so that's how I ended up living in the Fernald area.

03:02:18

Q:

So what were your first impressions of the plant when you first saw it.

A:

I really didn't give it much thought. You know, I thought well I guess it's something that has to be there that's run by the United States Government and uh, they're doing good for the betterment of the country. And I really, like I said, I never really worried about it one way or the other and actually at times thought it would be a good place to work, which I eventually ended up working there for a few years.

03:02:50

Q:

And did you know what the plant did when you moved to the area at all?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

A:

No, had no idea. Some of the people, I mean it's kind of funny in a way uh, some of the people, you know, they're from down in Kentucky or maybe Indiana and they just called that the bumb factory. Said, you know, that make bumbs over there. And they were talking about bombs, you know. And either case, you know, of whether it was bumbs or bombs it was right.

03:03:20

A:

And uh, of course I didn't know and I thought well, you know, maybe they do make bombs over there who knows. I knew, I did know that it was something for the, for defense and that's all. You know, and later found out that it was strictly a Feed Materials Production Center for the reactors in Savannah River and Hanford Washington.

03:03:41

Q:

And uh, how about your friends and neighbors, um have you ever had any discussions with anybody about the plant or have you ever heard any rumors or?

A:

Um, to be honest with you, no. There had been discussions about it and they're not very in depth discussions. Just kind of passing comments as to maybe what it's doing. You know, I've even uh, I have said myself, you know, I'm sure that the place hasn't done this part of the country or anyone living in this part of the country any good.

03:04:20

A:

It's like cigarette smoking, you know, it's not going to do you any good to smoke cigarettes but perhaps it's not going to hurt ya either. And, you know, I feel like uh, it hasn't hurt me in any way as far as health wise. You know, having worked there and also living there all these years.

03:04:42

Q:

And um, how do you think that Fernald as an entity changed the surrounding community when it came in?

A:

Um, it took an awful lot of, you know, things changed in as much as it was probably where there were probably a thousand acres over there. Uh, over half of which probably was farmed in the late '40's, mid to late '40's. I don't really know. Uh, living in Harrison I never really did get over that way but I'm assuming that was basically farmland over there.

03:05:21

A:

You know, it changed, it changed uh, just the way people looked at that general area. Uh, you know, everything's referred to as Fernald. There is actually a town or it's not an incorporated town I guess it's an area with Fernald, you know, you're now in Fernald. Uh, it kind of gave that a bad rap, you know, oh, you live there?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

03:05:43

A:

Uh, again same as with health things uh, I don't think it helped the area a bit. Uh, it provided jobs which is always, you know, jobs are necessary. And uh, but as far as it didn't help the area and how bad it hurt it I don't know. It's not really a glamorous part of Ohio anyway I mean this particular area that it's located at. So uh, again I just don't have a lot of feelings on that particular, as to what it did to the area.

03:06:24

Q:

Now you mentioned you uh, worked there. Can you tell us about how you got your job?

A:

Um, well I was working for my father and I wasn't making as much money as I knew I could make. And uh, so I went over there and applied for a job. And I don't know I think, I don't think it was the first time I walked in and applied and filled out an application but it was shortly thereafter I got a call. And also went to school with a guy named Charlie Nelson who his father MacDonald Nelson was the plant uh, I guess he was Plant Manager at that time.

03:07:09

A:

Now this was in 1959 and we lived neighbors to them. And he told me one time, he says go over there and he says, you know, I think you can get a job. Well like I said it didn't happen immediately but I had a job I think probably within two months of going over there. And uh, it was in Plant 6 rolling mill. And again uh, you know, when you go in there and you just hear things about the place and you wonder what you're getting into.

03:07:39

A:

And uh, you actually handled, on some of the jobs you would handle these uranium slugs and the thought crossed my mind, you know, is this safe to be handling these? And you would ask some of the other workers and uh, you know, they say well we've been doing it for several years and it hasn't hurt us. And there was a concern.

03:08:01

A:

And uh, I worked there until uh, from '59 until '64 in Plant 6 rolling mill and I got laid off. And uh, I was away from there almost 2 years and I got called back, or I didn't get called back, one Sunday morning I was looking at the *Cincinnati Enquirer* and I saw that National Lead Company of Ohio who was the prime contractor at that time. I saw that they were looking for Lab Technicians.

03:08:34

A:

So I thought well, I've never worked in a lab in my life. However I did have a Q clearance which takes several months to get and just maybe they would hire me because of that. Well I went over and applied and I did get that job and uh, I paid dearly for not having any experience in the lab because 2 years later I was making less money in the laboratory than I was making in Plant 6 rolling mill.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

03:09:05

A:

But it was a job and I needed a job and so that's, you know, the 2 times. Once I went over and applied just because I thought I could get a job there in '59 and the second time in the lab uh, I just thought maybe I could get a job there because of the Q clearance. And I did, so I spent some time in there and again there were a lot of things in the lab that you wondered about.

03:09:33

A:

You know, you would convert uranium, you would get uranium chips converted to uranium oxide. Take the uranium oxide and convert it uranium hexafluoride. And that was a process where if you ever dropped one of the glass vials containing it, you know, you definitely didn't want to breathe any of it. And uh, you know, there was a lot of concerns as to what's this doing to me.

03:09:55

A:

And again, I mean you never know what's going on inside your body but I feel like um fairly healthy. So, you know, right now I can say Fernald being, either being a neighbor or working there uh, hurt me as far as my physical or my medical condition; kind of strayed off to uh, how'd you get a job there, you know.

03:10:25

Q:

No, that's good. Um what were your responsibilities at the rolling mill?

A:

I was what was called at Millman, that was entry level. And a lot of the plants did have what was called laborers. And uh, I don't know why they, basically it was a laborer's job but it was it was a step above on the union place pay scales it was a little bit higher. And Millmen we essentially like I said you handled the slugs, there were furnaces that you had to heat-treat these slugs and uh, we got a lot of that.

03:11:00

A:

And there were a lot of remelt areas that I worked in and, you know, just general cleanup. Whenever they would change uh, you know, we'd roll enriched uranium for a while and when they changed over and they would roll normal, there would be a big cleanup. And same thing for when you would go to depleted. We never really handled much depleted it was either enriched or normal.

03:11:26

A:

But between the uh, the rollings and the campaigns of the different type of uranium metal uh, we did have a big cleanup. Which it basically took quite a while to get everything cleaned up and set up to run the other type of metal. And so it was, it was basically I guess for lack of better term, it was a laborer's job. Whatever needed to come up and I never really worked there long enough to get any type of promotion.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

03:11:58

A:

And when I say promotion it's a promotion because of you had enough seniority to go from a Millman maybe to an operator of some type or to a heater of some type. They had heater operators, cooling bed operators, straightening operators and those were the next steps up from Millman. And uh, I mean I was Millman from the time I started until I was laid off.

03:12:24

A:

And then in the lab uh, they called you technicians I think, I forget whether one, two, and three, being entry or three being entry but, you know, you go in there and you start off. And I did uh, I don't know whether they called it promotions or what but I did before I got out of there I think I went from the bottom to the top in those. And then beyond the one, two, and three you went from a Technician Three to a Technical Assistant.

03:12:56

A:

And then, you know, they called them TA's. And then there were even above classifications above that which, you know, I never, I wasn't there long enough to go any higher than what I did. And responsibilities there, I started off in mass, no I didn't I started off in the spec lab. Which uh, which is basically I can't remember the name of the instrumentation we used.

03:13:26

A:

All the work was instrumentation. I know I ended up in the Mass Spec Lab which was Mass Spectrometers which was probably of all the jobs I had in my life was one of the most enjoyable jobs I've ever had. Uh, it was very interesting and what that would do is take a piece of metal and uranium metal and it would break it down as to how much, U-236, U-235, U-238. It would break that down as to the various isotopes, how much was in a particular sample that we were running.

03:14:00

A:

And it was interesting, I enjoyed that. I still can't say that, you know, it wasn't a job that I just couldn't wait to get up and go back to in the morning. Unfortunately I've never had one of those but it was, it was interesting.

03:14:20

(Cameraman – can we wait just a second?)

Q:

Oh sure.

03:14:24

Q:

You're doing great. Um, okay if you could tell us just a little bit about your responsibilities when you were working in the lab.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

A:
Uh, I did go over those.

Q:
Oh, did you.

A:
That was Mass Spec, and working for Cecil.

Q:
Were you talking about how you broke down the different isotopes?

A:
Yeah.

03:14:45

Q:
How, how, can you explain how that worked?

A:
Not really. Uh, it was a very high magnetic field and somehow or the other the heavy isotopes, when they swung around this, I think it may have been called a Faraday Cup. This has been a long time ago so I don't remember the technical names for a lot of this. But the heavy isotopes would go to the outside and the lighter ones to the inside.

03:15:06

A:
And then they would go around and crash into a detector of some type and then they were measured. You know, that's pretty, pretty vague as to how a Mass Spectrometer works because it's very complex machine. And, but that's about the principle of it. You know, anyone any other people that know considerably more about it, you know, they could probably laugh at what I just said but that is what I remember of it.

03:15:40

A:
And they only had, you know on, I was basically I was, there was a guy named Jim Robinson who has passed away. Jim was in charge of the entire lab. Uh, then there was a Metallurgy Department and there was Instrumentation and there was what they called the Wet Chemical Side. Well this guy named Ray Sisson that ran the wet side. Charlie Pepper was my, not my boss he was considerably higher than that, but he ran the Instrumentation.

03:16:08

A:
And I don't know anything about Metallurgy side. But I never really got out of the Instrumentation side. And uh, when there was a spec lab, the mass spec lab and there was a radiochemistry. And I did very little work in radiochemistry. Uh, so it was basically spec and mass spec is where I spent my time in the 5 years.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

03:16:33

A:

Then I did get laid off from there. And at the time of the layoff they were looking for people, well Fernald allowed us to, to use the watts lines as much as we wanted. And while we were on a shift try whatever it took to try to find another job. And so I had uh, on Nation- on NLO's time I had sent in a application or I had made contact with Procter and Gamble to try to get a job there.

03:17:02

A:

And uh, between Procter and Gamble actually offered me a job. I was offered a job from NLO to go over on the wet chemical side. And I think I may have worked over there, if I worked there a month I'd be surprised. I was really not thoroughly trained in any of the procedures. I was doing some pretty uh, simple analysis at the time and I don't even remember what they were.

03:17:30

A:

Uh, but P&G called and offered a job and, you know, I took that job opposed to staying to a spot where I'd been laid off twice and probably would have happened the third time if I had taken that job on the wet side.

03:17:49

Q:

Now what was the purpose of running the material through the Mass Spec machine?

A:

To determine uh, how enriched I guess enriched it was. There were numbers like I think the number on enriched was 1.25 up to maybe two something and I don't know percent of what maybe, the good stuff. I think it was U-236 is what they were interested in. Uh, U-238 was predominantly what the material was I think and it's I guess basically useless.

03:18:24

A:

And uh, so I think it's the percent of U-236. Again, I wouldn't, wouldn't say that that's absolutely true. Buy enriched was like I said 1.25 up to maybe two maybe 1.75. Normal may have been, the high end may have been up around 1 or the 1.25 and it'd go down to maybe .7 and anything below .7 percent would be depleted. And I actually worked, I just happened to think they had a Mass Spectrometer over there called a Thermal Ionization unit.

03:19:03

A:

And uh, for some reason that it may still be a big puzzle as to why, but at that time when the material would come back from the reactor uh, one of the isotopes would go up. And again, it's strictly a guess I'm thinking it was a U-236, no that's, I shouldn't even talk about that because I don't know. Um, but that is another piece of equipment that I used was the Thermal Ionization Unit. And it was just a different type of Mass Spectrometer.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

03:19:40

A:

And uh, it wasn't very user friendly. They had what was called spikes, I mean it would take sometimes it might take two hours to do a scan. And if you had an electrical spike you had to just go back and start all over again. And that happened more times than not. It was very aggravating to work with and I don't really too awful much about it other than the fact that it was there.

03:20:08

Q:

And uh, did you ever talk to your family or friends about your job?

A:

Um, not in depth I mean, you know, it was supposed to be hush-hush as to what was going on over there. And uh, you know, I think I would tell them some things like well I don't think, you know, it's as dangerous as what they say it is. And, you know, they it's just not too bad of a place to work and things like that.

03:20:39

A:

You just was supposed to really be quiet about what went on over there. And I don't think again in 1959, I think that the big secrecy of it was down quite a bit from what it was in 1951, 2 and 3. I mean it was my understanding and it was gone when I got there but it was my understanding that it was more like a prison on the outside.

03:21:06

A:

You would, chain link fence in every corner. And if a run of chain link might go for a mile or two across there they'd have posts and various increments from one corner to the next corner. And there would be guards in there, you know, stationed in there. And just to prevent anyone from, you know, trying to break in there and I guess steal any secrets or anything.

03:21:30

A:

I mean I don't know I worked there and I wouldn't know where to go to get an secrets, you know. In either place, so I didn't know the big secrecy around it all. But I mean there was, it was a national thing, you know, secure area, keep it that way.

03:21:49

Q:

And how much did you know about the process when you started your job there?

A:

Uh, none. 'Cause when I went to the rolling mill it was a little while I guess before I even realized the uh, the actual, they called 'em slugs that they would drop into the reactors, they were different size. And I think the reactor in Savannah Georgia took the ones that were not as big as the ones in Hanford. And, you know, I had, to this day I have no idea as to why the reactors would be different.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

03:22:28

A:

Because I was under the impression, you know, they're extracting from that what they want out of the metal. And uh, but for the difference in size for the fuel cores I didn't understand it. And uh, so, you know, what was it you asked now, how much I talked about outside?

Q:

Yeah, that and also, you know, how much did you know about the process.

03:22:54

A:

Oh, how much did I know. Um, going in, you know, nothing and really after working there for a total of 10 years um I couldn't tell you an awful lot about the process, you know. They had Plant 4 which I think has been torn down. Uh, that was the green salt plant. I had no idea where green salt fit into the picture. You know, because I never worked in there.

03:23:18

A:

You know, I worked in, we did do some green salt analysis but I think that was putting the green salt in a muffle furnace and converting it to oxide. And I don't even know, I don't know what it was for. I mean I don't think the green salt contained any uranium, but I don't know. You know, again I know nothing about what took place in the other plants over there.

03:23:45

A:

I never worked in any of the other plants. Plant 6 was one big building which was kind of divided down the middle. And the west side of Plant 6 was the rolling mill and the east side of Plant 6 was machining. I spent a lot of time in machining uh, just because it was there. You know, if things were slowed, you had friends that worked over there and they had the Acme-Griddlies, that was machinery that took these rods that we made over on the other side and cut 'em up into the slugs.

03:24:17

A:

And that was actually like a big metal lathe but they would turn 'em, some of 'em had holes drilled in 'em. That would take place over there. And but again, you know, all the why's and the what for's why some had holes and some didn't. Why some were small and some were large, I don't know. They even had some, I would say they were probably 3/8th of an inch thick and maybe that big around (demonstrates with fingers).

03:24:41

A:

And I mean it was just a circle of uranium about that long and I was told that some of these rods that we made, this outer one, something would go down in between there but whether that was right or not, who knows. I mean it's just things that I had seen that really had no understanding of, of what it really was.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

03:25:03

Q:

And what kind of training did you get before you started your job there?

A:

In which place?

Q:

The rolling mill at first.

A:

The rolling mill? Basically none. I mean they probably uh, they had an orientation I would say and I'm not, I don't remember for sure. But um, you know, as to whether we went in and saw a film or anything like that uh, there was no training except basically kind of on the job.

03:25:32

A:

You know, you went in there uh, I started there I remember the month was in August and it was on second shift which was 4:00 until midnight. And uh, you would go in there and they would say well here's where I want ya. And I started off on was called the Newsouth Furnace. And that was just hanging, like hanging baskets and each one of these things that was hanging on there had three holes.

03:26:02

A:

And you would take these slugs and put three across. You'd do it with two hands so, you know, you'd go and you'd have six put away, you'd move down and, or six more and six more until you filled this whole thing up. And then an operator, the furnace operator would pick that up and put it into the Newsouth Furnace.

03:26:22

A:

And, you know, some Metallurgist said, you know, if you leave that in there for 10, 12 minutes, you know, your grain expands to a certain uh, certain way they want it. And they have studied that if this was quenched either in water or in oil most of the quenching was done in oil so it wouldn't, I mean if you put a red hot slug down in water is just, the water doesn't come in contact with it very long, it's too hot.

03:26:51

A:

There's a space in between the water and the slug. And but anyway the oil supposedly stayed close to it and they were always heated a little bit but I mean it wasn't like boiling or anything like that but yet it was considerably cooler than what the slugs were when they came out of the furnace. And they would quench them in there and they would leave 'em for a little bit.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

03:27:14

A:

And then, you know, they would come out and I think they, I don't know. I believe I guess when they picked it up they let it hang over the oil furnace until whatever they were quenching it in I think it was oil 'til it dried off, not dried off but dripped dry. I'm, again I'm not exactly sure on that. Um, but as far as, you know, getting back to the training they'd say well here it is and here's what you do.

03:27:42

A:

You know, and like I said that's when I had a concern, well is it safe to handle this stuff. You got your pair of gloves on, they talk about lead shields to keep uranium, I mean these gloves aren't going to stop anything. You know, but I didn't realize that's it's really not basically hot uranium of any type, it's just a metal that contains, you know, small amounts of the various isotopes.

03:28:04

A:

And again, I can, there was no training but I can also say that I don't think that that job, you know, did any harm to me.

03:28:18

Q:

Wait there just a second while we switch tapes.

TAPE FLHP0187

04:01:05

Q:

You were talking about what it was like to work third shift at the rolling mill.

A:

Um, third shift in my opinion is the best shift to work in the rolling mill. And the reason for that is there's basically no production going on. Our job was either to go in there and I know one of the things was barrel the crop ends.

04:01:25

A:

And the crop ends when the, when the ingot would be rolled and you'd get two rods out of it and they would crop the ends off of 'em so they would be flat. And then they would go on through the blooming mills. We'd unload those, that would take, you know, an hour or so to get all those drummed up. You have to tear all your drums and do all your weights and everything.

04:01:45

A:

But it basically was pretty good shift to work because you may only be heat-treating some slugs that may be the only thing going on in there. It's a small crew. Uh, it's just in the summertime it's

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

definitely a cooler place to be. And uh, I did work a little bit of second shift and I can recall uh, walking in on second shift a lot of times around five till four to hit the clock 'cause we had to be there at 4:00.

04:02:18

A:

Uh, you know, on a beautiful day like today with the sun shining it would come in the south end of that building and you could just stand and look up at it and just see nothing but dust coming off of the uranium. It's uranium oxide, but the cooling bed was right there at that south end and every time the cooling bed would click to roll a rod off the end that's cooled to go to the straightener.

04:02:42

A:

When the hot one came on the other end probably for half way through every time they would click and move towards the straightener end a puff of dust would come off of them. And actually the only person at that time, there was a big colored fellow named Jim, I think his name was Jim Bates and he, his job was, he was stamping numbers on the end of here.

04:03:08

A:

And he was really the person, the stamper on that particular job was the only person required to wear a respirator. And, you know, you look back on it and it might not have been a bad idea if you were working first or second shift to wear a respirator all the time, because there was a lot of dust present in that particular end of the rolling mill.

04:03:27

A:

The other end it cleared down a little bit because it just, everything was either submerged, you know, the ingots were submerged or when they were rolling it just wasn't getting the pounding that a rod gets going across the cooling bed to loosen up the oxide. So I enjoyed third shift and I would say out of the 5 years that I worked in the plant, I would say probably in excess of 4 years I spent on third shift.

04:03:58

A:

And the same thing in the lab mostly was third shift and that was by choice. I didn't have enough seniority to work days and I didn't want second. I mean you just can't do a thing on second shift 'cause I had a bad habit of sleeping late in the morning. You get up and turn around twice and it's time to go back to work. Then you get home late at night and get something to eat a little bit and maybe watch some, at that time *Johnny Carson* or *Jack Power* I don't remember. But uh, I enjoyed the third for those reasons.

04:04:33

Q:

Now you have a unique perspective because you live close to the plant while you were working there too and uh, in the middle '80's you were going from Fernald already at this point. You'd been laid off well you left for P&G by this time, um but in the mid '80's there was some dust collector releases and a lot of media attention about what was going on at Fernald.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:04:55

Q:

Um, although you were in a different job then you have a unique perspective 'cause you live so close to the plant. What were, what was your reaction to all that?

A:

Well in the mid '80's I had no reaction whatsoever. My reactions as to what was going on over there really didn't start until 1988. And I was on vacation and I was in a Madison South Dakota with my dad, we went up there pheasant hunting and uh, we were all in this place eating.

04:05:26

A:

We had eaten dinner after hunting that day and uh, couple of us went into the bar. And I was sitting there at the bar in this restaurant and they had a TV going and the next thing, you know, I look up and here is something that looks somewhat familiar. And you couldn't hear it they didn't have the TV loud enough but you could do the reading, I mean there was some words at the bottom and come to find out that it was Fernald.

04:05:51

A:

Well at that time, that was in October of 1988 and I wouldn't be afraid to say I might be wrong but I would say that is probably when, when it all hit the fan as far as what Fernald was actually doing over there. About the releases as far as how much uranium had blown off of that site since 1950. How much ground contamination had been done.

04:06:16

A:

I mean all this stuff and I mean from that point on then I got concerned as to, you know, what are they really doing over there. Well not what are they doing what have they actually done. And uh, but, you know, you had mentioned the mid '80's, I don't, if there were things that coming out of there then it didn't get the publicity that this did.

04:06:41

A:

And from that point on um it just seems like the only publicity coming out of that place was bad publicity. And then you have your, you know, your people trying to just totally shut it down like Lisa Crawford and the Clean org- I think it's called Clear or. (Comment - FRESH) FRESH yeah. That organization um, you know, I never got real active with 'em.

04:07:10

A:

I don't, I don't have any feelings one way or the other, you know. I'm glad there are people like her out there to try to get to the bottom of things like this. I mean if it's a real problem it should be taken care of. Uh, I never really myself got involved with any of that. Um, I, I feel like the one thing Fernald has done is devalued the price of, that I should be able to get for my house.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:07:42

A:

Uh, I'll just, you know, well I won't even pick any numbers. I mean if my house is worth X amount of dollars sitting uh, on the eastern side of Cincinnati, it's worth less than that X amount of dollars sitting as a neighbor of Fernald. I mean and I can't say I can't sell my house because I've never tried. But I'm confident in my mind that I'll have to take less dollars for that house than what it's worth.

04:08:12

A:

And for that reason. And the media never seemed, you know, I'll ask real estate people, you know uh, what do you think, do you think I can sell my house, are houses selling out there in that area? And everybody says oh yeah houses are moving, moving good. Well one thing, you know, I don't think they realize they probably are moving good but these houses that are moving good it's one of those out of sight out of mind things.

04:08:40

A:

Uh, if you go up to Ross there's some very nice subdivisions up on the hill in back of Ross. And those houses, if someone wants to sell them they put 'em for sale and they're gone. Right now over at the corner of New Haven and Crosby Road they're developing uh, there's house under construction right now. You know, and those houses will, will be bought.

04:09:02

A:

People bought the land, obviously and if they want to see their house, you know, it will eventually, if they eventually want to sell they'll be able to. Uh, if you go on down New Haven Road from there there's a place called Auto Estates, it's up on the hill and Auto Estates homes are selling up there. But again, out of sight out of mind.

04:09:20

A:

I'm not out of sight. In the wintertime when the leaves aren't on the tree uh, trees you can, you can see the place. And people just, I don't care what they say I think I'm going to lose some money on it. And uh, I mean I really feel like where I have been hit most of all is in, my neighbor got a sizable amount of money for property devaluation.

04:09:49

A:

And I applied for it and I didn't get it and I'm not gonna get it because I worked there. But that's understandable but, you know, I have received money for being a neighbor of Fernald. I got \$500 and that's because I was a neighbor. I've taken three or four physicals because I was a neighbor. And I question, you know, getting, getting the money as a neighbor.

04:10:20

A:

And they said well you can't get it 'cause you worked there. And I said well if, then give me the physical every year as a worker gets. You know, I don't get a physical every year 'cause I'm a

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

neighbor there, you know, you have gotten physicals as a neighbor. And another thing I've always said, you know, you can't fight City Hall, let alone the Federal Government.

04:10:40

A:

But I actually believe if I wanted to pursue it and spend the money which I don't want to do, I could probably get property devaluation money. And I'm a little bit of both. I have received money both as a worker; I've received money the \$500 because I was a neighbor. I've received physicals because I was a neighbor. I did fight long enough I'd say well if I'm going to be a worker and I don't get the property devaluation money, give me my physical every year.

04:11:11

A:

Because it's my understanding that the people who are neighbors get a physical every 2 or 3 years until the money runs out. Well eventually the money's going to run out. It's also my understanding that the people who worked there get a physical every year and the money will never run out. There will always be money there for people who worked there.

04:11:29

A:

They say well, they finally came to the conclusion if I would give them back the \$500 that I got, they would put me, so they're admitting right there that, you know uh, I was a worker. So, you know, and I have talked to lawyers before and, and you know, I said I really wanted to be considered cut and dry one or the other.

04:11:51

A:

I said, I am both. I am a worker there and some of the people I worked with at P&G said well you'll have it made, you know, you're going to get money 'cause you're a neighbor and you're going to get money 'cause you worked there. Well, it doesn't work that way. And uh, it's like I say, I really feel like I've been screwed around when it comes to getting any money on the devaluation on my home.

04:12:10

A:

Which I when the time comes to sell it, you know, I think that money would have really helped. It would have brought it up probably to what the house would have been worth. And so that's my, my main concern and gripe is the fact that I didn't get that money and that I'm gonna lose even more money when I go to sell the house.

04:12:31

Q:

And as a community member, um, how's it make you feel about the government?

A:

I mean, the government is the government. They do a lot of things, you know, whether it's Federal Government. Government at any level has a real good ability to waste money, you know. And I mean

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

even at the country level, I've been fighting with Dusty Rhodes, you know, over this, these property taxes.

04:13:02

A:

They're going around and they're raising everybody, they're going to raise everybody's property taxes. And I really believe that you have to have money to run the schools and everything but um, you know, when I call him up and say, you know, I was even I wrote a letter. And in the letter I put I was even naïve enough to think that perhaps me and other neighbors of Fernald might even get a break on taxes.

04:13:25

A:

Because of what we're getting beat up over there, you know. And, you know, to get back to your original question, the Federal Government uh, I don't have any ill feelings I guess. It hasn't made me look at them any different than what uh, I ever have. And I've never been a big person to follow, get into these big political discussions and arguments and everything.

04:13:53

A:

'Cause I mean you probably shouldn't feel the way I do, but I look at it and I think what can I possibly do, you know, 1 person. To change anything the Federal Government wants to do and it's just not going to happen. And if everybody felt that way I mean if Lisa Crawford felt that way, you know, things wouldn't have gone as far as they did right now.

04:14:14

A:

And so I see, you know, that a group of people can make things work. But, you know, I still say just me and me alone forget it. There's nothing that can be done, you know, from my perspective.

04:14:29

Q:

Let me ask you this too, since you were also a worker there, um, do you feel like, did they actually tell you that you were working with radioactive materials when you were there?

A:

I'll be honest with you, I don't know. My best guess is yes they did, you know. But that's been too long ago. You know, that's been uh, this month has been 30 years, 40 years. I can't even add, 1959 until 1999. I started in August of '59.

04:15:05

A:

I don't remember what they told me, you know, when I started there. I'm sure they did. I really believe that they probably did say, you know, and we did have safety meetings, you know. And a lot of times the safety meetings uh; they would occasionally pertain to how you should handle.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:15:22

A:

But that is not what safety meetings were about. Safety meetings, we had safety meetings at Procter and Gamble. You know, and it's safety meetings as to how to handle, you know, maybe how to handle hazardous chemicals. Even safety meeting as far as what to do in case of a fire in your home, you know. It's not work related all the time.

04:15:41

A:

Safety meetings are just as what they, how they're named, you know. And so uh, I, I don't know how to answer that any better other than, than I would say they probably did tell us, you know, that we were handling that. But uh, and they probably did tell us, you know, that it's not going to hurt you handling this stuff.

04:16:03

A:

And again I don't think it did hurt, I know it didn't hurt me. And I know other people who have worked there; I have friends that live in the Harrison area that worked there. And they're, you know, other than being older, they're the same as they were back in 1959.

04:16:24

Q:

So also um being a resident did you have any issues about the water?

A:

Um, I personally really never worried about it. I think if, if I had to be located around Fernald, I'm probably in the best location. I'm on the, the west side of the plant and it's my understanding that the aquifer that my water is coming from, it runs from the northwest to the southeast and uh, that I draw any water that I'm drawing out of there is before, you know, before Fernald.

04:17:05

A:

Uh, as far as the wind, the wind predominantly comes out of the north and the west and it's, I'm on the west side so I get very little wind from there. Uh, I think those, those are the two things, I do know that my ex-brother-in-law and his wife when they would come to my neighbors house which is my ex-mother-in-laws house um they wouldn't even, they would never drink the water.

04:17:36

A:

And they would bring pop and they would bring their own ice cubes. They would never even; they didn't want anything to do with that water. And I don't think they really had anything to ground that upon other than the fact that in their mind they didn't want any part of that water that they thought that it could have been contaminated.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:17:55

A:

And my water was checked by Fernald once a month for many, many, many years. Of course, you know, you can say well that's like the fox guarding the hen house, you know, having Fernald check your water. Everytime I would get a report back from them it would say, you know, you're the uranium level in your water is no more than normal background levels, you know, anywhere in the United States.

04:18:23

A:

There is uranium everywhere and radioactivity everywhere and , you know, there's going to be some show up in water and yours is safe. So the one thing that I have to look at, my water has also been checked by the EPA, more than once and the Ohio Department of Health has checked my water. There was a guy over there one day, now he, to my knowledge he only checked it one time.

04:18:52

A:

And he said, you know, all results I get basically say the same thing, that there's no problem to drink that water. And the guy from the Ohio Department of Health he said, and he just kind of went like this he said these places down here will do more damage to water than what Fernald ever will or ever has done. And he was referring to the other Paddy's Run Road where there was a couple of chemical plants.

04:19:23

A:

When I first moved down there it was VC, Virginia Chemical and it's changed hands a couple of times and I think it's uh, AW now, Albright and Wilson is one of them now. And the other one of 'em is Reutkers on the corner. And they are pretty nasty places. They do nothing for the, the beautification of that Fernald area, you know.

04:19:45

A:

And again, I'm out of sight there. I never had people ask me well what about these places down here. But, you know, back to the water, um I have never felt unsafe drinking the water and I do to this day. But my ex-brother-in-law and sister-in-law, they just wouldn't do it. And she has now since, you know, because of the Knollman's, their water some of the wells over there were actually contaminated.

04:20:10

A:

And I mean it was contaminated from Fernald. I guess that's a no doubter where that water got contaminated from. So the government has put city water out there for Knollman's and I guess other reasons I don't know. But it goes on down to the bottom of the hill and it goes up Paddy's Run Road as far now that it is safe for my ex-brother-in-law and sister-in-law to drink water at her mom's house.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:20:35

A:

Because she does have city water, I think she has to pay for it but she didn't have to pay to have it put in. Knollman's, they didn't pay for it or don't have to pay for it uh, on a monthly basis. And uh, I think they did go up the hill a little bit with that water but I don't think any of the other neighbors, I think if they want it they have to have a tap in fee which runs quite a bit and they wasn't interested in it.

04:21:01

Q:

And were your relatives worried about the water because of all the media attention (Comment – uh-huh) is that why? And what kind of discussions did you have about that, you know, when they would come to visit you right across the street from the plant?

04:21:16

A:

Um, I don't think this started with them until 1988. And 1988 they were ex in-laws and so we never really had discussions about it. And I don't think they quit drinking the water up there in my neighbor's house until after '88. You know, I could remember years ago I mean they would drink, they drank the water. I mean, you made iced tea you cooked with it, you know.

04:21:40

A:

You get it in various ways and they had no problems back, you know, from '58 until '88. I mean everything was fine, it was just all the publicity that hit the TV and the newspapers and I mean it was all over the United States, not just the Cincinnati area.

04:22:00

Q:

Did you ever see any of that coverage on TV?

A:

Uh, well if you watched the news at night. Yeah, I mean you couldn't keep from seeing it. And I saw quite a bit of it yeah.

04:22:16

Q:

What was it like to see the area that you live in, in the pages of *TIME Magazine* on 20/20, on *60 Minutes*, what was that like?

A:

Well I guess it really, actually seeing something like that uh, and you're right it was on 20/20 I think, one of the news shows. Uh, they had a 20 minute segment on it and it makes you think well, you know, some of this stuff it's got to be real.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:22:50

A:

I mean, it can not be that they did not come over here and operate that plant for 40, 50 years I guess and not do some damage. I mean, it's got to be real. But again, and I never would take the defense of the United States Government and that but there's a lot of people, you know if, if the dog gets sick, oh that's because of Fernald. You know, everything's because of Fernald.

04:23:18

A:

And I don't think, you know, you're this far on the spectrum and this far on the spectrum, and somewhere there's got to be a happy medium. I don't think that every time someone died of cancer that it was a result of Fernald. I mean people die of cancer all over the world and Fernald I don't think is the cause of that.

04:23:38

A:

I mean, it's just a dreaded nasty disease that they haven't found a cure for. And until they do, people are going to die from it. And I don't think that everybody in the Cincinnati area that died from cancer died because of that. And, you know, conversely I do believe that it probably has caused some illnesses and problems with health.

04:24:02

A:

But who am I to say, you know, give any percentage, well this is what I think? I mean I don't have any facts or anything to back it, it's just gut feelings, you know, as what, and for me to see it on there I guess, you know, um I figured the damage had already been done. And that's doing nothing to help it as far as me. My main concern is to be able to get rid of my house and not give it away.

04:24:27

A:

And um it's a real nice house and I don't want to give it away. And I have to have what the house is worth so I can move onto my further plans, you know. And that money is needed.

04:24:40

Q:

So you kind of feel trapped in the area?

A:

Um, right now I would say yeah, I'm pretty well trapped if I don't want to take a big loss.

04:24:50

Q:

Wow. Um, gosh what was the other thing? You're facing that property right there and you've probably been watching what's going on with the cleanup, how do you think the cleanup is progressing?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:25:09

A:

I guess it's progressing according to somebody's schedule. As far as if they, if I think they'll ever get it cleaned up to the way it was in 1945, probably not. Uh, there's always going to be scars over there in some sort. Whether it's in the form of looking at some of those buildings, I don't think that's eventually ever going to be turned back over, cleared and turned back over to somebody to farm.

04:25:35

A:

I just don't think that'll happen. Uh, I have to smile when I ride my bicycle down Paddy's Run Road and I see these big treated lumber boardwalks going down. You know, it's a ecological restoration park, you know, that, to me that's a waste of money. Who, and maybe it's because I live there but I can't picture people uh, even living in Northern Kentucky saying oh we have to get over there to Paddy's Run and see the new parks they're putting in over there.

04:26:07

A:

You know, nobody gives a too-hoot, you know. And I think it's a waste of time and money to put something like that in. You know, devote your um your dollars that you have for cleanup to actual serious cleanup and that's just a, maybe trying to pull the wool over people's eye, I don't know. You know, nice this is. You know, the deer, they do fine.

04:26:32

A:

I see plenty of deer all the time. I count 'em in my backyard every morning, you know, you can see deer. And I think one of the reasons, um there's so many deer right in my area, besides that there's a lot of corn to eat and a lot of beans to eat, is because there's 1,000 acres sitting right over there that nobody is going to bother them.

04:26:53

A:

And I think they know that. They have, I think that's where they spend their night. I've seen 'em grazing with the cows over there. And I think, you know, they go out to eat and they go out to get water and things but I think mainly they spend most of the time inside the confines of that place.

04:27:11

Q:

And uh, I, I, if you think, you know, anything about the cleanup at all, do you know that they are building an On-Site Disposal Facility there?

A:

No. No I had no idea.

04:27:25

Q:

How do you feel about leaving some of the, some of the um, basically construction debris and those kinds of things, there on site instead of taking it off-site?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:27:35

A:

Well it doesn't add, you know, used to be you could look out my front window or stand in my front yard and look across there. And with the cattle and everything it's always, it's a nice peaceful setting and now you can look on beyond the field that's directly across the road from me and you can see, I guess there's a like an indentation in the earth. That's where the creek, Paddy's Run and then it goes back up and on the other side.

04:28:00

A:

Uh, now there's trailers, there's mounds of dirt, there's things like that. And I think is this going to be a permanent fixture now, from now on. I mean are we going to have to look at this? You know, that's even worse because this time of year, I still know there's something going on over there. There's noises that come from over there.

04:28:18

A:

But I would just leave the stuff I'm looking at over there right now, you know, that it was gone, you didn't have to look at it. Um, but I don't think that's going to happen either. I'm assuming that that is part of the cleanup.

04:28:31

Q:

Do we need to change tapes real quick? How much time do we have left on that one?

04:28:41

Q:

Um, since you live right across the street from Fernald what would you like to see done with that land once the building are gone?

A:

Well, as I just said, I don't think the buildings are ever going to be gone. I mean I'll ask you a question, do you think they're ever going to be gone?

04:28:58

Q:

They've torn down quite a few of 'em. (Comment - yeah) Their intention is to level everything.

A:

Well I mean, here's the ideal scenario in my opinion since I live across the street. I would like to see it basically the way it was in 1945, farmland, you know. Cattle grazing, the farmland and stuff like that. But I, I don't think that's even the remotest possibility of anything like that happening. But I mean if you want to, what I would like to see, that's what I would like to see.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

04:29:28

A:

You know, because I stop and think, people, people ask me about living there and I say well now this is not because of Fernald. I mean, they just say what do you think living out where you live in the country. And I say well if I explained it to ya and told you where I live, and what's across the street I said, the AEC has an atomic energy plant across the street from me.

04:29:50

A:

I said, there's a lumberyard north of me that makes a lot of noise and hammering. There's a railroad track that runs in back of me, I said you wouldn't want to live there. But, you know, even with all that stuff there, it's quiet and I think it is getting cleaner. Uh, because of the efforts that are going on over there. They are making an effort to make it a nice place to live again.

04:30:11

A:

Whether it'll ever happen I don't know. But, you know, the trains used to run by there 5, 6, 7, 8 trains a day would go by there hauling even passengers. And there would be coal and now those tracks have been torn out. The only place a train goes by once a day to go down to Fernald to the chemical plants. So the train's no problem and Fernald really right today the way it is I'm assuming is no problem.

04:30:39

A:

And the lumberyard is no problem. And I'm really at night with the exception of the occasional car that goes by on Paddy's Run Road; it's so quiet. I mean, and it's dark and I mean its, despite of everything that's gone on over the years, it's really not too bad of a place to live. But, you know, ideally to have it changed around like I said. You know, turn it all back to farmland that would be great. And I think it's probably going to go.

(Tape stopped)