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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

Name: Maurice Hornbach

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Tape FLHP0093

23:01:06

Q:

Um, we always ask the hardest question first. If you could just give us your name and spell it. Just to make sure we have it right.

A:

Maurice, M-A-U-R-I-C-E. or H-O-R-N-B-A-CH.

Q:

Great, we usually start with a little bit of background; ah, where were you born, where did you go to school, tell us a little bit about your family.

23:01:31

A:

Oh, okay. I was born, do you want the date.

Q:

Sure, if you want to.

A:

Well, I'm proud of this, ah 12/25/35, Christmas baby and I was a twin. Ah, we lived Indiana, out by Yorkville Indiana and ah, there's a lot of those residents still working at Fernald. And at that time, there was quite a few working in ah locality ah, Yorkville, New Elises, Guilford, ah. Went to St. Martins church, ah to the school, parochial school, and ah, went to Guilford High School, graduated from there in 1953.

23:02:13

A:

And ah, went in the Army in '58 to '60. Fort Knox for basic, Fort Hood, Texas for ah the duration. They said did you go overseas? Yeah, I went across the Mississippi River (laughs). So in ah Texas at the time. Prior to going to the Army I met ah a next door neighbor ah, Margie Guiser. And ah, we dated, dated. And when I was home on Christmas leave in 1958, got married.

23:02:50

A:

And she went to the Army with me at Fort Hood, or Clean, Texas, we lived off the post. And ah came back here to ah, Ohio. I was working at Partridge Meats at the time as a sausage maker. And I was going to get property from my parents out in Yorkville, or I could get property from Marge's parents.

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A:

23:03:14

So we chose that, because it's only 17 miles to the plant from here in downtown Cincinnati verses 40 miles. This is before interstate also. So ah, worked there until August of '82 when John Merrill had purchased five or ten years before that, and they downsized. And they closed the plant. Now, what am I gonna do, I'm 48 years old and all this kind of stuff.

23:03:46

A:

And ah, I thought well I'll just get in the unemployment line, but lo and behold, Fernald was ah, looking for a Fire and Safety Inspector and I, God only knows what this is gonna be. So ah, I applied for it. And you had to be five years in the fire service in a command position. That means a captain or above. Well, at this time I was assistant chief at Crosby Township, well at the time it was New Baltimore Fire Department

23:04:21

A:

And ah, I started there in 1965, it was all volunteer. So I was a captain, assistant chief, so that fit that criteria and I was also a Ohio EMT, Emergency Medical Technician and this was basically the requirement. So I applied and lo and behold I got the job. And I worked there from July of '83 as a Fire Safety Inspector, and you want me to tell you a little bit about the job?

Q:

Yeah, that'd be great.

23:04:56

A:

Okay. Uh, I thought well you just go around and inspect buildings. This, that and whatever and you do very little and be waiting for the big one and all this kind of stuff like an old cliché or saying that the firefighters all say in the fire station, we're just sitting around waiting on the big one. Well it wasn't that. I got there and lo and behold you were doing everything and doing quite a bit.

23:05:26

A:

You wore many, many hats and I think that was versed several times. We worked from, well we worked a uh rotating schedule. One week of day shift, second shift, third shift. When you was on day shift everybody, it didn't matter who it was, everybody was working from 8:00 to 4:30. When 4:30 came uh, the fire inspector that was on second shift would become all of the sudden the doctor, the nurse, the fire chief, the industrial hygienist and also the health physicist, or the rad tech.

23:06:16

A:

So we had to not only give open burning permits for welding, we had to give confined space permits also rad working safety permits. And it, it was fun and a lot of times you had a lot of things to do at one time but everybody helped on the back shift, everybody helped one another. It was a different story back shift than it was the day shift.

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23:06:43

A:

But uh, if something would happen, a casualty would happen or a big incident, all of the sudden now we have to get rid of the one cap and now you become a PED, a Plant Emergency Director. So you were the person in charge until the person in charge was called out of bed or wherever to come to the site and take charge. So we had a lot of responsibilities but we had a lot of people that we could, we worked with.

23:07:18

A:

Like the chemical operators, the uh, the garage mechanics. They were our driver operators, they were beautiful people. The security, everybody was helped one another and I really have regrets that I've left, but that wasn't my doings. But anyway in 1991, '92, I went into training and that was due to the fact that I had some heart disease and under the National Fire Protection Association, you have to meet a certain physical requirement.

23:07:58

A:

So I did take the 240-hour, or the NFPA, National Fire Protection Association, Level II training which was a rigid training. I did take that and uh, but uh the medical personnel did say, did be suggested that I go seek another job. And I love training. I trained our fire brigade under uh, when I first started, under NLO, National Lead of Ohio.

23:08:30

A:

The fire personnel were called emergency brigade. They worked in the water treatment the Boiler Plant, chemical operators and they would have to respond to where the fire was. And they did have vehicles that they could drive, or even ride a bicycle. However they got to the incident and then we were in charge of them. And our drivers, like I mentioned before, for ambulance and fire trucks was the uh garage mechanics.

23:09:05

A:

And there was garage mechanics on all three shifts. But uh, basically that's just about the job, well during the day you had, we had all the plants in a months time in a 30 day period, every plant, every area was inspected for fire and safety by the fire safety inspectors. And uh, well we did, we'd take pictures on incidents, safety concerns, if it was an accident we had to do an investigation of it.

23:09:41

A:

Why the incident occurred, the accident occurred, how it could be prevented and other so other employees wouldn't get further injured, whatever. But uh, that's basically what our job was all about. And you did get to see lots and lots of people in an 8-hour period.

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23:10:08

Q:

And uh, when you first started at Fernald, how much did you know about the process and what was going on at the plant?

A:

Really, I didn't. I knew that it was, well in '61 when I moved here and even prior to that, 'cause when I graduated in '53 they was, I wasn't really old enough to get a job without a work permit. And I surely couldn't have got a job over at National Lead at the time, that's what it was called National Lead or it was called Atomic Energy Commission.

23:10:43

A:

And uh, I heard some people, not so much then, as just hear in the last 20, 20 or less years, people calling it the bomb plant. I never heard that before. Never heard that, and it was after I basically about the time I started working there that I heard it dubbed as a bomb plant. And uh, I knew very little about it. And the people that I graduated from school with that worked there, my buddies, they wouldn't say anything about it.

23:11:19

A:

Didn't say nothing about their job. And I'm talking you know I can sit around and drink a beer and say hey, I was making sausage all day and this kind of stuff. But they couldn't say what they were doing. Whether they were sweeping floors or actually working in the plants. But no, I had to learn that when I started there. All the, and it was top secret, I mean it was secret, I couldn't even come home and talk to Margie about it or next door neighbor or whatever.

23:11:50

A:

You know, about any of the processes that I learned. We were told not to. And it was suggested we didn't. So I guess we held that dear, near and dear to us you know our process to keep a job. 'Cause we didn't know how this was going to affect us. You know, it might be a felony or whatever. So that's why we didn't say nothing.

23:12:16

Q:

Did you have to get a Q clearance to work at Fernald?

A:

They had 2 clearances, I'll take that back, they had 3 clearances when I started there. There was a crypto, which is the highest one you can get and I'm sure throughout defense departments and anything else in any clearances, I'm sure still that is the highest you can get. Then there was another one which was Q clearance and then there was an L.

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A:

Now the Q, Q clearance person could go into certain areas. Now us, as fire safety inspectors we went to every nook and cranny on site. If there was a door we had been through it. It didn't matter. But if it was a Q clearance person only we had to be escorted by a Q person. Uh, or person that has Q clearance. And I heard at one time the L was a top secret, I mean a secret clearance and then the Q was a top secret and then a crypto, that's as high as you can get.

23:13:26

A:

That's for top executives and people with at the time I understand it was uh, data processing and all the facts and figures, that type of thing. When I was in the Army I worked, I was assigned to an honest John rocket outfit and it was in the artillery and it had a nuclear warhead capability. A missile and a rocket are two different things.

23:13:54

A:

Rocket is non-guided so it was launched and it would, it was on its own after it left the launching pad. But anyway, we had to have top secret there in the Army and my clearance only took three weeks to get. And I understand there was a lot of people that when they first applied for a clearance, even the L, it would take them anywhere from 2 to 3 months for the background check.

23:14:27

A:

But they had to go from '83 to 1960 when I left the Army and that's where I had my top secret. So I guess that had something to do with getting it that quick. But it only took 2 to 3 weeks. But as far as knowing what was going on over there before, no. I had some kind of vague idea, uh, as assistant chief with the Baltimore Fire Department.

23:15:01

A:

Myself and may he rest in peace, Bob Brotherton, he was our chief. Bob Lippincott was the manager of safety, I mean fire and safety and he invited us in 1969 and '70, it might have been more like '70, when they had the layoff about now they were going to do mutual aid with the off site fire fighters. So we did take a walking tour one Sunday on site, but as far as any processes, what we was actually manufacturing, all we heard there was a lot of uranium chips that could combust and be, have an open fire.

23:15:57

A:

And we would be dealing with Class D metals, or Class D fires, which are metals. That's the only thing that we were told. And that we would be surveyed, we'd be, if we did come on site we would actually be isolated and we would be monitored and if we'd have to we'd be decontaminated. But it wasn't really explained what all this was about.

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23:16:25

A:

And uh, so we never did have to respond in to the site. Only the back shifts. Only second and third shift, our ambulance would go in and go to the medical and pick up some, a worker that was injured and had to go to the hospital. But as far as our fire trucks at that time no, our fire engines no they never went on site.

23:16:55

A:

Uh, their tanks, Fernald's tanker used to come out to our, 'cause we had no plugs in our district, and uh they would furnish water for us. And I mean it was a godsend to see 32,000-gallon of water coming to you when we only had 11 and 1200-gallon tankers. But it, and the people were real nice and they helped us out and all this kind of stuff. But, no as far as answering your question we really didn't know, I didn't know what was the processes. But we had to learn it, we had to learn what was going on.

23:17:33

Q:

And when you did that first walking tour of the site, what was your impression of the physical plant?

A:

We use, I could only see the plant and sort of the, oh the silhouette of the buildings you know a mile, a mile away from Willey Road or 128 or 126. You could only see the building but when you actually got in there we found out, this is a city. We had a First Street a Second Street that ran east and west and the, my gosh you got A, B, C, D running north and south and uh it amazed me, it amazed me.

23:18:27

A:

Then there's the water treatment, where they treat their own water. They have their own sewage, they have their own, uh not a power plant, a plant to produce steam for all of the heat and everything within the facility. And also the cooling waters for all the processes. It just, I was amazed, I was amazed and so was the chief, Bob Brotherton.

23:18:57

A:

We were both amazed at how big this place was. And we thought my gosh there's a city within Crosby Township that we did not know about. We knew it took in something like 1100, 1200 acres, we knew that. It had a security fence around it. That's the only thing we knew and we knew they had fire plugs and we didn't. We knew that.

23:19:23

A:

It used to be a sort of a little comical thing that Crosby Township was the only one without fire plugs. But we're starting to get some now.

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23:19:36

Q:

And while you worked at Fernald, um, what were the early years like comradery, what kind of people did you work with?

A:

I found after my first, I'm scared the first day, it's like going on any other job, you're scared, you're scared stiff because every face is a new face. And then all of the sudden when you uh, you sat and read procedures and every day you had different type of training on this that whatever. Not only on the job, I mean not as far as my job responsibilities, I had that coming in.

23:20:12

A:

I had to know fire-fighting and I had to know EMS, Emergency Medical Services, how to do first aid and that kind of stuff. That I wasn't scared of. And I wasn't scared of anything else, it's just here's these books on uranium processing, radioactivity and all this kind of stuff. Then you get into a safety manual about Occupational Safety and Health Administration and OSHA.

23:20:46

A:

Then you got NIOSH, and all of this on respiratory protection and yeah, it somewhat scared ya. Now was you going to learn it or was you just going to turn in your badge and go on home. It was a challenge. But then as you got to get out into the process area, and I found this myself, one of the fire fighters, or fire inspectors that always worked my shift when we got on rotation.

23:21:21

A:

On day shift, there was most generally two on the day shift 'cause there was a lot of activity going on. Bill Prues. We used to go give, while I was taking my training and we was in a month training before they turned us loose on our own on different shifts and we used to go into plants giving welding permits to the welders and to maintenance.

23:21:50

A:

And it seemed like every time there would be three or four different people, hey Maury, hey Maury how ya doing. And Prues used to say well you know more, and he was there a year before I was, he said my gosh there's more, you know more people here than I do and your just the new kid on the block. And I said, well my gosh half of these are my cousins you know they're back to my old place, Yorkville, New Alsace, Guilford where I grewed up.

23:22:15

A:

And these are people I, some of them I haven't seen in years you know 'cause I was in the Army and living in Ohio and I very seldom got to see them. But uh, overall the comradery you could walk down the street, you could walk in a building and whether you've seen this person before or not, they would always say hello, bid you the time of day. And if you didn't they would think something was wrong with you.

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23:22:46

A:

So you had to jump in and hey good morning how are you, you know and uh, whether it was a good morning or not it just seemed like the comradery was there and everybody said hello to one another. And uh, it was a friendly work place.

23:23:08

Q:

Great, and um, anything kind of funny or unusual happen to you while you worked at Fernald?

A:

Well, there's been some funny things, some sort of humorous, it goes along with basically any kind of job. I had an, I was a fire instructor for the State of Ohio. That was one of my credits coming in the door also, and also with the American Red Cross, First Aid and CPR. I don't know what brought me into the, getting hired or not, I hope so.

23:23:47

A:

But anyway, this was in I think '86 or '87, Bob Lippencott, my manager said, hey Maury, you're still a State Instructor through the Vocational School District through Scarlet Oaks? And I said yeah, I still keep my uh certification up, and up until last year I've let it lapse, matter of fact June of this year. June of '99 is when it's lapsed.

23:24:21

A:

Well any way, he said we've got all these fire brigade, now the uh the fire fighters is called Emergency Response Team, then they were called the Fire Brigade. And uh, he said, "Can you get everybody basic trained in fire fighting?" And I said yeah, I can do it, it's going to take me a while. I said how much time do you have. Well, if we break it down, can we do it in 2 months?

23:24:55

A:

I said, well I'll have to talk to my coordinator over at school, over at Scarlet Oaks School District, vocational school district, maybe I can work something out where I can do it one week, one week, one week. And so I did seven weeks and we went through all of the brigade members. But in there, we had men and women alike in the fire brigade.

23:25:22

A:

And uh, there was one small lady and I've been trying to think of her name, but anyway, she was a rad tech and that's when we started getting '86, '87 we started getting more and more rad techs coming on site. And this young lady was from Idaho and she had worked in one of the power plants out there and went to school on being a health physicist. Well, anyway she was in the fire brigade and we had a, I've been trying to think of her name basically a couple of hours and I can't.

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23:26:02

A:

Cannot think of it 'cause she didn't last, she didn't stay that long, she got another employment. But anyway, Steve Rose, he was a big burly garage mechanic and Tuesday, about Wednesday of this 40-hour class that I was teaching these classes. Bob Lippencott, the manager says every one has to know how to drive the fire truck because if it's a, what if situation and the engineer, the fire engineer or the driver, something would happen to him and couldn't drive the truck, we need somebody to drive it.

23:26:48

A:

And you guys as fire inspector you are the officers. So, the fire fighters are going to have to know how to drive the truck. So every Wednesday Steve Rose would take two people and they'd do about half an hour, 45 minutes and they would drive probably in a round trip maybe a mile and half or 2 miles. They'd go out to the old training ground.

23:27:13

A:

But anyway, Steve, he was proud that he was chosen to do this and he could drive just about any piece of equipment on site, heavy equipment or whatever. So he always made it a big ado that this 312 was the engine, it was American LaFrance pumper, he always made it a big ado that it was hard to shift. And it was a shifter. You had to clutch it and you had to double clutch and all this kind of stuff.

23:27:49

A:

And you had to keep the RPM's up with one foot and keep the clutch on and all this kind of stuff. And he made a big ado about it. Well anyway, low and behold this girl, when it was her turn to drive, Steve's sitting in the front seat and the other guy is in the back seat in the jump seat. He was very cautious, because this is the first girl, and there was five or six that was in all of the classes but we only had one or two at a time.

23:28:19

A:

He, but this is his first time to have a girl with him and he was very cautious with her and he kept saying now you gonna be okay, you gonna be okay, this is going to be rough, this is going to be rough. And anyway they went through the, they had to stop at security to go out the gate, when the gate was closed, that's when she took over.

23:28:49

A:

I guess she started out and she was double clutching all the way out and she was going at a pretty good rate of speed and Steve hollered at her, slow down, slow down, you're going to have to turn left up here and if you can't make it go right. And he, or go straight ahead. First thing you know she start down shifting, double clutching down and she safely went into there and went around.

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23:29:16

A:

Well anyway, when Steve got back to the heavy equipment building he was in awe. He had nothing really, he had too much to say because he was laughing and he, that wasn't his personality to laugh and all this kind of stuff. Here it turns out she was a, she was born and raised in Idaho and they, she lived on a farm that raised a lot of Idaho potatoes.

23:29:48

A:

And from little on up if you could drive a vehicle, you'd, she used to drive, she called them tater trucks. And they were, had a big trailer on it and she said you ought to see me back a tractor trailer.

23:30:02

Q:

We're going to need to change tapes. Hold that thought.

A:

Okay.

TAPE FLHP0094

01:01:04

A:

So anyway, when we got back into the uh, when they got back into the classroom she was telling us all about driving a tater truck. And she said this is nothing compared to one of those big trucks that has a couple ton of potatoes on it. And you had to know how to drive them and she says, you ought to see me back a tractor trailer.

01:01:25

A:

Well, we didn't let her, turn her loose on that. But anyway, the thing is, this changed Steve's attitude about ladies preferably being in the, maybe in the fire service because before this time period when I first got there, there was no females or women on the fire brigade. And even out here in the real world there was very, very few that was starting to come on.

01:01:54

A:

But anyway, uh, Steve did change from then on out. And it was always a big, big thing about her driving the tater truck and he was really over emphasizing this truck. But it was, it was a difficult truck to drive, but she mastered it very good.

01:02:20

Q:

So while you were working at Fernald did, were you ever frightened by the radioactive aspect of stuff or?

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A:

Not really because the awareness classes that we used to get, well the training wasn't as, it was just starting to come on in '80, the Westinghouse year. We had some training about health effects, but it wasn't as in depth as it is now. Like rad safety training. We had once a year nuclear criticality you know they had, but it wasn't, we had it, like I say it was basically awareness and letting us know.

01:03:09

A:

And then you had the booklets that you could read if you wished to you know do your homework. And uh, brings me to mind, one, I was issuing a welding permit in Plant 8 and I don't even know who the chemical operator was, but anyway, he was a brand new chemical operator. First day I believe it was, this was in the morning.

01:03:37

A:

And one of the older chemical operators and names sort of are a little vague right now, and anyway, the older chemical operator, he was there with maintenance 'cause it had something to do with a pump or whatever, the chemical processes. But they were there and their job was actually shut down on account of needing this welding done.

01:04:04

A:

Anyway, the older chemical operator said to me he said hey Maury, he said how long you worked here? And I think I was only there maybe a year, year and a half, something like that, and he said, well you had a full head of hair when you started. He said what happened? And I said well, I don't know. I said I don't know if it was radiation effects or not.

01:04:34

A:

And uh, the chemical operator, the young one was looking amazed. Well anyway, later on in the day, the, I don't know it was a comical thing about it or a humorous work antic that went on. Uh, they said I had to go to Plant 8 for something, I don't know what it was, but anyway, uh, I didn't see this young chemical operator with the old chemical operator and I said where's that guy at?

01:05:09

A:

He said, oh, he left and when he went to lunch and took his shower and got into his street clothes to eat, he went on home. He never did come back to work. So, I don't know if he just left or what it was but anyway, sort of that little antic went around that 6-month you lose your hair. But anyway, that is not true and we're going to set the record straight right now.

01:05:41

A:

That is not true. I was bald when I came in there probably from 1961 or '62, by the time I was getting out of the Army. This was way before I started at Fernald. But that was a, sort of a little antic that went on for, well almost the whole time I was there. Somebody would say, hey tell this guy it only took 6 months for you to lose your hair.

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01:06:08

A:

But that's not true. The antic is true, but the part behind it is not true. But it was a fun thing. There used to be some that I cannot recall. Humorous things within the work and also uh, there was some sad things too. We got to the place where we knew people. And we knew you know, if family a member was sick or had a heart attack or something like that, everybody felt for them.

01:06:46

A:

Well, it's just human nature I guess. But uh, there was, there was some good times and some bad times too. Nothing casualty wise, that kind of time.

01:07:02

Q:

Now, probably one of the more serious things you had to deal with when you were there was an HF release in 1987. Can you tell us about that day and what happened?

A:

Uh, yeah, it was on or about 9:30 – 10:00 and my buddy Bill Prues and myself. I was coming on day shift, he was going off, off of his day shift and it was on a Friday so the person that was coming on was a, was the sort of the PED or the person in charge. And anyway, we were on First Street just about Plant 8, we were going west and we seen this big plume towards the Pilot Plant on the east side of Pilot Plant where there was chemical lines overhead.

01:08:02

A:

And Prues said I think that's HF. So we quick went down, now this is when we were um, this was in the Westinghouse era, shortly after they took over. And uh, we were going from a transition from PED to Plant Emergency, Plant Emergency Director to what the utility engineers are now and I'm trying to think of that acronym.

01:08:33

A:

But anyway, the person in charge, what we're saying. So I pulled in, pulled off to the side and chemical operators are coming out of the east door of the Pilot Plant with acid suits and also their air packs. And some, one of the chemical operators said hey, we got a HF leak and it was a flange on an overhead piping that it came loose.

01:09:06

A:

And so I quick got on the radio beings I was the incident command and I called control to activate the EOC, the Emergency Operation Center. And so that part was being in the process and these workers, these chemical operators and we didn't even get the Emergency Response Team there neither. They had it already mitigated. They had the leak stopped. Everybody, Prues jumped into an air pack and got his acid suit on.

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01:09:49

A:

Uh, the utility engineer was there with a ladder. There was even a construction person came in and helped out and from Rust Engineering. And we were, we had it completely taken care of. The leak stopped before I got a answer from the EOC or control saying that the EOC was activated, the Emergency Operation Center.

01:10:25

A:

And we were all uh, got appreciation's from Mr. Lagroons, which was the uh person in Oak Ridge with the Department of Energy. We were commended on our speedy action and Buzz Luken from Butler County, he also had a article in the Hamilton Journal in regards to the fast action that the Fernald workers have.

01:10:57

A:

And it was just teamwork, that's all it was. We have the drills, we used to have those drills and they still do, exercises. And uh, it seemed like you would be all hyped up for 3 weeks 4 weeks ahead of time and seem like every time when the drill actually came down, or the exercise, we would do a little mess up. But that's the place where you want to mess up, when you're practicing.

01:11:30

A:

It's just like playing football. You know, you go out here and you do your scrimmaging amongst your offense and your defense within your own team, this is where you want to mess up. But you don't want to mess up when the uh, the opponent comes on your field you know. That's where you better have the bugs worked out.

01:11:49

A:

And fighting fires and chemical releases and anything else. When it gets down to where the rubber meets the road, we'd better do it and we'd better take our training and put it to work. And that's what happened. And these guys really did a super great job, super great job. But that's, while I worked there that is the only HF, or hydrofluoric acid leak that I know of that called for the Emergency Response Team.

01:12:26

A:

We used to simulate it through training a lot. We'd have smoke bombs and whatever simulating the release. But that was, that was one that, that I was directly part of.

01:12:46

Q:

Now in the late '80's of course that's when a lot of things started coming out in the media about Fernald with the dust collector releases and those types of things. And um, a lot of politicians got involved and the area residents got involved and those kinds of things. Now you, if you can explain to

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us what that was like both as a workers point of view and a trustees point of view some of the things that happened during those years?

01:13:12

A:

Well uh, when I started at Fernald in '83 (cough - excuse me) I was a Township Trustee for Crosby Township and uh our meetings were laid back. It just seemed like nothing was ever going on and it seemed like uh we just had our own business. Paying our checks for maintenance and keeping the business going and whatever.

01:13:46

A:

Fernald sat to the north of us, Fernald Plant, Department of Energy Plant. Let's not get it mixed up with Fernald down in the little village or the town. That was a train station and that's how the Atomic Energy Commission when they were building the Atomic Energy Plant at Fernald or north of Fernald, everything came from that depot.

01:14:12

A:

I hear this from, heard this from some of the older workers over there. And some of the workers actually worked for the construction company and they said everything had Fernald on it. Fernald, Fernald, because that's where the bill of ladings and everything came through was by rail through C&O at that time, now it's CS&X.

01:14:37

A:

But anyway, uh it got dubbed Fernald. So let's don't get the two mixed up. But up at the Department of Energy site, we knew it sat over there. We knew there was 1100 acres that we weren't receiving tax duplicate. But that's no big thing, it's a governmental thing and that's part of the governmental process. But anyway, we were getting ready to have a meeting, our monthly meeting.

01:15:04

A:

Those were always the second Monday and the last Monday of every month and we were at the civic center getting ready, which only holds 40 people, all of the sudden we have cars in the parking lot. And the parking lot, if you put everybody side by side real tight you maybe can get 250 cars. Well this place was packed, they were out on Boffman Road they were out on Oxford Road and parts of New Haven Road.

01:15:34

A:

We didn't know what in the world was going on. And so, and I worked at Fernald at the time, I worked that day on day shift and I didn't know what was happening. But anyway, people were hollering Fernald, Fernald, the dust collector broke loose and all this kind of stuff. So, uh, Warren Strunk Sr., Warren Strunk Jr. used to be a trustee, well his dad was prior to that, same time when I was.

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01:16:07

A:

He was our chairman and so we got the Hamilton County Police out there and did traffic control. And we re-routed, they wanted a public meeting, everybody wanted a public meeting about the dust collector at Fernald. So anyway, we got a hold of the principal at the school or the custodian and anyway we got the school auditorium opened up. And there was probably 350, well the auditorium was standing room only.

01:16:40

A:

Anyway, this was when the Plant 9 dust collector was released out to the public. And I guess this is when all the secrets of the Fernald plant had actually been put out in the open. And it was a, I hate to say this, it was a hostile meeting, friends and neighbors. Some people worked there, most of them didn't. But it was a hostile meeting and uh the management of Fernald was there to give the announcement publicly.

01:17:17

A:

And they were scrutinizing, thank God nobody brought eggs in or rotten tomatoes or whatever because they would have surely got it. It was a very, very hostile meeting. But then things over the years, we have, the FRESH organization was formed shortly after that meeting. And the Fernald Environmental Safety and Health for the residents. The organization got going.

01:17:50

A:

There was pros and cons about them and all this kind of stuff. But now there is a working relation and it's much better now than it was then. There was a lot of things that came out of that meeting like uh, an environmentalist from Miami University, I don't even know a name, but that's the only thing I can recall.

01:18:15

A:

He also was a biker and he said he, when they opened it up to the public he was saying I used to ride around on 126 and 128 and Willey Road, Paddy Run Road and I always seen those red and white checkered water tanks, uh, plus I would see in front of it at the entrance to Willey Road that it was Feed Material and Production Center. And he said I always thought it was a uh, a Purina Plant.

01:18:58

A:

And that is how it really got started. And that was brought out in the very first meeting. That's how that got started that a Purina Plant. And it sort of ticks me off now any time you see in the paper or some journalist writes an article on the Fernald, they always have to slip that in there. Like that's the first time it's ever been said.

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01:19:27

A:

But the first time, or they'll say somebody else said it. And there's another one that scares me, I don't know it's all repetitious, they talk about the fox guarding the hen house. Well, that came from Tom Luken. He was our, our Congressman at the time. He was the one that brought that up when he came out to a public meeting. And now a lot of people want to take credit for it.

01:19:57

A:

But there was a lot of, it was bad stuff at the time you know. Some of it was true, some of it was truth that stretched almost to the point of being a lie. And I don't want to say everything was a lie and I don't want to run down the news media but things were stretched beyond it's, being truthful. But somehow we are getting things, we I'm saying that, but everybody, getting things to a nice, where you can talk to people again.

01:20:34

A:

But at one time, it was, you were scared to talk to anybody. And if you were a worker there, you didn't want to talk to the public. Because you don't know what might be put in the paper what you said. Because all of the sudden the secret thing is now open. The gates have been opened and everything comes and goes.

01:20:57

A:

But it is, it's going to be a slow process of the absolute cleanup, whether it ever will be, who knows. We don't know that. But it's sure closer now than it was 10-15 years ago or in '84 it's much closer.

01:21:15

Q:

And since you have a lot of contact with area residents because you are a trustee, what other kinds of legends or weird stories have you heard from people?

A:

Well, some of them, I, they've been so many, I just can't recall many. I was a trustee from '81 through '84 for a 4-year term and I wasn't reelected for the next term. So I chose to stay out of politics. I am now a zoning inspector for Crosby Township but as far as the political thing, I don't do that. But uh, there was a lot of weird things, whether they were dreamed up.

01:22:08

A:

I never seen no facts while I worked at the site. And I, like I said, if there was a door there, a fire inspector had been through it sometime or another. And if you worked there, you don't have to work there a long time and doing our monthly or daily inspections, every door we had went through in a month's time, one of us did. And it probably took about 6 months and every inspector had been through every door.

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01:22:40

A:

So there was, and I never heard the workers even in the cafeteria talk about this, that or you know weird things going on and all this. And if we did hear it we just shrugged it off because we know most of them were impossible. Like one said the only effect you'll ever get from uranium is if it falls on your foot, you might get a broken leg.

01:23:07

A:

But all uranium wasn't radioactive neither. I mean there was some depleted and there was some that was. But uh, it just goes like any part of walk of life. We can stretch things to it's, to the place where it's almost impossible to try and believe. But yet, we got people that will believe them, on the other side.

01:23:36

Q:

Did you hear any stories around the neighborhood about the silos?

A:

Oh yeah, about the red checkerboard and all that kind of stuff is that what you're talking? Oh, at the silos. Not until, not until everything was made public and then we all knew about it at the same time. People used to prefabricate their own stories about it but uh, K-65 Silos, the only story I ever heard and I did read about it, is the, that that was the Manhattan Project.

01:24:19

A:

And I always said thank God for the Manhattan Project 'cause we wouldn't be free today had it not been for the atomic bomb. And it's sad that the byproducts and the uh, or the um, the waste from it, the building of the first atomic bomb has to be stored in Crosby Township. And that's from what I understand that's what's in the Silo 1 and 2.

01:25:02

A:

And uh, but there was some people you know saying they saw the stuff coming right down Paddy Run Creek and all this. But you got to, I didn't brush it off but I didn't go investigate, but I worked there and surely through all the rad safety technicians that were working there shortly after Westinghouse took over, they surely would have found all this.

01:25:30

A:

Yes, there is a plume that is going down the Aquifer, I have to believe that but uh, I can't prefabricate a story you know. Like the Irish say in, about kissing the Blarney Stone. If you kiss the Blarney Stone now you, you can go out and you can tell stories and please don't let the truth get in the way of a good story. And I'll try not to do that because I did kiss the Blarney Stone. But uh, yes, there's been prefabricated stories and I don't, wouldn't even want to record some of them.

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01:26:08

Q:

Um, let's see. There's been a lot of discussion about what's going to happen to the land that Fernald sits on and uh what would you personally like to see happen to that 1200 or so acres?

A:

Well I think the consensus is uh like green space. Maybe we can do it for recreational, maybe we can do it for historical purposes such as the Native, Native North Americans. The burial sites. I thought that was a great gesture to be able to do that. And then because you know children in the next generation, two generations, three generations from here uh, oh my gosh you know.

01:27:03

A:

Sure the Native Americans are 1000 year old now and then every year it gets older and older but yet we done something by you know, sure they were found through Cultural Resources through putting in the water system and thank God for that. We got water and our, in parts of our township. But it's sad that it took a incident such as the plume to get us water but uh, that brought on some bad medicine amongst some of the neighbors too.

01:27:39

A:

Some got it free, some had to pay for it. But I don't have no bad feelings about what's going on. But anyway I would like to see, you know, if we could put it to some kind of use such as where people can reflect back. A nice pictorial museum type of thing showing the early Atomic Energy Commission from the making of the first atomic bomb. Going all the way to '89.

01:28:10

A:

And now we got the Cold War that is boom all of the sudden we're going into disarmament instead of armament. This would be great to be able to have a relive of that. And uh, even if we could do something like that on that site. Because we do have the waste from the Manhattan Project and I don't know if there's any other silos throughout the country that would be storing this.

01:28:39

A:

It would be super great if we could do something like that and show all the aspects. I'm sure Oak Ridge has got something at their lab and their facilities you know on the Atomic Age. But we, we got it right here. I mean we got the pieces of it. It would be nice, not to expose it, but showing some illustrations and whatever.

01:29:09

Q:

Great, we just need to switch tapes one more time.

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TAPE FLHP0095

02:01:03

Q:

All right. You mentioned a little bit about the Cold War, and uh, of course the '80's were really some of the height of the Cold War, um, post sort of Cuban Missile Crisis kind of times, um, what was the typical American's attitude during the Cold War?

02:01:22

A:

Well, we were going through a, the early part of the Cold War, I can only speak relating it with Fernald, we had a lot of production, lot of production. And it was production was in, actually increasing. I think when I started in '83 there was something like 7 or 800 workers all total at Fernald at the time but they still needed to have fire and safety protection plus security and this kind of stuff.

02:01:57

A:

But it, the production was very, very limited but when they shut down in '89, I think it was July of '89 when they stopped production right about there they was three shifts of production doing the ingots and the whole bit. Uh, producing uranium metal like they were back in the '60's and '50's but we didn't have a roller mill, that was the big thing that went out in '69, '70 when they stopped the roller mill process.

02:02:34

A:

That was all taken care of in uh in Piketon up in Ohio. We would send our metals there and they would roll, uh roll it out to whatever form it was going to go to and also Rocky Flats, there was big orders on that. But uh, really uh, the attitude of the workers was you know just like all of the sudden we got production going you know and we had to do this, that and whatever.

02:03:07

A:

And uh, I don't think anybody felt sorry about it or anything like that. But it was uh, the company was rebuilding the tank farm. They got rid of the antiquated chemical tanks, acid tanks and uh the Pilot Plant was coming on line. They were building a new uh, facility for the U-6, U4-U6 processes and uh it was, you could see it was progressing.

02:03:45

A:

But then when the Cold War stopped, got here, and worldwide everybody is disarming and we are too as a nation, it didn't fall apart it just was now we're going from production to remediation. And there took in a lot of training. Much more training than we were getting before, just beefing up for production. The remediation, it was a different style of work that chemical operators had to go through.

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02:04:21

A:

And even the support workers. Like fire and safety, all of us. We had to do something different and we had to train for this different job and it was on-the-job training that we were doing. And it was a rough process but now, you know now we've got almost 10 years in, well next month will be 10 years, July.

02:04:45

A:

Uh, it's getting to be old hat to them you know on the remediation. They know how to do it but at first they were scared to death. Not scared as far as any hazards but am I going to do drumming, am I going to test the drums, am I going to do this, am I going to do a safe shutdown on a building you know. That first building Plant 7, you know it took, we thought it took forever and a day.

02:05:12

A:

Now, uh, I'm away from it but it just seems like it's old hat. We know what to do you know. Abating the asbestos and everything else and making a safe shutdown. And that is just to assure that everybody that works there on that job is going to have his arms, his legs, when he goes home. And make sure you don't get bumps and bruises in between neither.

02:05:43

A:

That's what a good safe shutdown, training, training is really come a long ways out there. And somebody said it's almost like going and getting an associates degree before you go to work. Well, make fun of it but it pays off in the long run.

02:06:01

Q:

And tell us a little bit how you built up that, how you helped to build up that safety culture on site. What exactly did you guys do to make sure everybody would be safe?

A:

Well really management jumped in and they, they told us and they came on board. Because everybody has to buy into safety. Safety isn't something that you just come down the street and try to sell somebody. Uh, it doesn't work unless everybody, everybody it doesn't matter, and even our visitor has to be uh bought in to it for it to actually work.

02:06:40

A:

And it's no more than when we go down the road in the morning, make sure we got our safety belts on. You put on, you let the other person know you're going to turn right you put on your turn signal on. Uh, and if we can have them attitudes at work regardless of what we do, if we can have that attitude at work, we will have a safe place to work.

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02:07:10

A:

And we got to all of the resources in the world anymore. Years ago we didn't have everybody at one time said well they're nothing but a bunch of watch dogs like NIOSH, OSHA, and the EPA, these kind of people. No, they're out here to help us. They are being paid by our Federal government, we're paying their wages for them to help us.

02:07:38

A:

You know, even the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, these are good things. But they're no good, they're not worth two dead flies unless we jump in and back them, we have to. You know, that old thing where we throw motor oil into the creek after we change it in our car. No, we can't do that. We got to use some common sense because we have environmentally messing up the whole country.

02:08:08

A:

And if we do that as a homeowner and let it go as an industry, just one industry or many of them, it's going to affluent the whole world. Well, you can see some of the cooling waters on the Mississippi from all of the steel mills. You know, at one time we pumped the water out and then we pumped the affluent right back into the Ohio.

02:08:36

A:

Uh, we don't do that no more. Let's clean it up before we get rid of it. The papermills and the breweries along the Mississippi did the same thing. But now we got, we educated ourselves. We found out we were killing too many fish and other plant life and whatever. So, Fernald was no different and it's no different right now and we have to and it's all part of safety.

02:09:06

A:

I'm talking environmental but environmental and safety is the same as, they go hand in hand and we have to be total safety conscious at all times.

02:09:20

Q:

And you served your country while you were in the Army for a number of years, and how do you feel that Fernald helped further America's mission?

A:

Well it helped uh come on with the, they had a good product from what I understand. I wasn't a metallurgist or anything like that but I understand their product which was uranium metals, it was one of the purest or one of the best at nationwide that came out of the Fernald site. And it went towards shielding, the depleted went towards shielding. Some of it went towards armament like armor piercing.

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02:10:13

A:

Where uh you can take a shell and it will actually go through steel because uranium metal was actually that hard. And it'd be, that's what it was all about. We didn't prefabricate it here, it was prefabricated someplace else but the metal was molted from, well Plant 1 started out as getting the raw uranium ore right from uranium mines that was trained in with the train.

02:10:51

A:

And then it was pulverized and all this. Then it went through the digestion system in Plant 2 and 3 and the denitration. Then in 4 it went into the processes of orange, I mean green salt through the chemical process and then it went to Plant 5, from there, so that's why all the numbers of all of these plants they had a true meaning. You started out with number 1 and you came out of Plant 6.

02:11:23

A:

One end of Plant 6 would take you in the uranium metals then we had a polishing effect on the after it was extruded, well when the rolling mill was going on. Then they had an inspection on the north end where everything was actually inspected and everything was micrometered according to its specification.

02:11:49

A:

But uh, it was just, it was a real good process as far as the industry. The metals did, were beneficial to our nation's armament you know for the, between the second and Korean War and afterwards, up until the Cold War was over. And uh, but thank God we don't need that no more. But I think their product was from what I understand from the old timers, the people that actually dealt in it that could talk, they said it was one of the best. Well they were proud in their product that they were doing you know.

02:12:43

Q:

Great, and uh is there anything you want to add, anything that we didn't talk about that you wanted to cover?

A:

Oh my gosh. No, I don't believe.

02:12:57

Q:

Great, well thanks for spending time with us. We're going to do a thing now called natural sound, it will just take a second. We just need to keep quiet on the set while we get sort of a tone of the forest back there I guess. This is nat sound.