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Transcript

Name: Pete Kelley

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Tape: 89

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Tape FLHP0206

14:01:25

Q:

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

A:

My name is William Kelley, called Pete. Pete's a nickname. K-E-L-L-E-Y.

Q:

If you could give me a little bit of background – sort of pre-Fernald – of where you went to school, where you were born, where you grew up, uh, that kind of thing – jobs before Fernald.

A:

Okay, a native of Alabama. I went to high school and college in Florence, Alabama; Florence, Alabama, is my hometown. I went into the Marine Corps after high school and then went to college at the University of Alabama. Um, and, uh, spent 11 years with a newspaper, again as a reporter and became managing editor and then editor; the happiest time of my life. Didn't make any money but it was happy.

14:02:13

A:

Uh, then started chasing that almighty dollar and went became the first PR director for a waterway, the Tennessee Tom Bigby Waterway, which was connecting the Tennessee River with the Tom Bigby. Uh, stayed there 5 years. Went to Washington with Congressman Ronny Filipo from Alabama for, uh, 6 years and he decided to run for governor and I knew he was not gonna get elected governor, so I started looking and I wound up here, with NLO first for 9 months.

14:02:43

A:

And I, I knew they were leaving and they knew they were leaving because they, uh, didn't, wasn't going to bid on the project. But I didn't, wasn't sure who the new contractor was going to be. As it turned out it was Westinghouse. They kept me. I've been with them since '85. I'm still with them (laughs).

14:03:05

Q:

(Directed to cameraman: no problem. It's better. I'm glad you did that.) Okay, so when you first got to site, um, what were your first impressions of the Fernald site?

A:

Well, when I first came here, I was hired by NLO in 1985 as the first Public Information Officer. And, uh, I had done some research on NLO and Fernald a little bit before I came here in the Library of Congress when they asked me to come for an interview and I got some information.

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A:

The first thing I found was about the fellow who was – box furnace – was supposed to have been burned alive in the box furnace. So, I didn't know what was going on with that, but I came and talked to them. And they, the NLO folks were qualified, decent people and it's a shame that they, uh, kind of lost their reputation here at this, this place because they ran the place for 34 years and never missed a quota on uranium production – ever.

14:04:11

A:

And they stayed on schedule. They stayed below cost. Did their job. And their job was not to clean up. And the job was not to, uh, communicate with the community. It was to make uranium metal. That's what they did. And that's all they did. They did, they asked for money to clean up and, uh, correct some problems out there, but, uh, they didn't get it so they couldn't – and things started to happen that led to their demise.

14:04:40

Q:

Tell us about your interview. Who did you interview with to get the job and what did they tell you about Fernald before you came here?

A:

I had six interviews (laughs), believe it or not. Uh, NLO had a Washington person, uh; I was in Washington when I hooked up, when I got the ad about the job at NLO. And they had a Washington person. I interviewed with him first, the National Lead Industries (NLI) Director of Public Relations. And he came from New York to interview me. And there was the Washington fella. I interviewed there.

14:05:17

A:

Then I came here and I interviewed with four or five people here, including Jim Reafsnyder, the DOE manager who got here two weeks before I did, and, u, three or four Westing-, different Westinghouse people; I mean, uh, three or four NLO people. So I had six interviews before I got the job. I won't say I got through all of them but, uh, I managed to get through (laughs).

14:05:52

Q:

Now, during your research, uh, on Fernald sort of before you came here, what are the types of things that you found that you thought might be a problem when you did get here?

A:

Well, you know, when I got here, I interviewed with Weldon Adams and I talked with him. And George Smith was the HR manager. I was to work for George Smith but report directly to Spencely. Uh, and that worked out fine. Uh, they told me everything that had happened.

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14:06:31

A:

They told me all about the environmental problems that they had. That there was groundwater contamination off site; that they had released, uh, uranium into the air; uh, that the neighbors had formed an organization, FRESH, and, and had filed a \$300 million class action suit. And on and on and on – all the reasons why I shouldn't come, just about.

14:06:55

A:

But, uh, it was a 20 percent increase that they were offering. And I was looking to get out of Washington and get a little bit closer to home, uh, so I decided to take it. When you were starting at the bottom, you couldn't go wrong. You were starting at the bottom. They had nothing in terms of a public relations program; uh, nothing at all, so you couldn't go wrong. So I decided to take it and stay, and, uh, I wound up here for 11 years (laughs).

14:07:30

Q:

So, um, when you – when you came here, you were aware of all the, sort of the, public furor that was happening and you, sort of, were walking into the, sort of the fray of things from the very beginning. That first day of work – what exactly happened that first day of work?

14:07:48

A:

Uh, the first day of work, after I knew that I was going to be here, they, uh, they introduced me to some people that they had. Everybody was meeting on NLO about information, about what had taken place, and what they were doing and all that. But fundamentally their response had been, “no comment,” to media and that sort of thing.

14:08:15

A:

But they had appointed a committee to, uh, to work on information products, at least a start. They had department heads, largely, to do that. And I met with them and we were talking about doing a videotape and a slide show and, and brochures and that sort of thing to get some information about the site that we could give to the media and to everyone.

14:08:44

A:

So we had that meeting. Then I had to find some people to work with me and for me. I got Kathy Rhodus – Kathy Rhodus was, uh, the first person that, uh, came to work for me. She has now worked for the last five or six presidents of, of, uh, the company here at Fernald, I think. She's splendid. Uh, then they – there was a fellow here named Homer Bruce who had been here since Methuselah was a cadet, I think (laughs).

14:09:12

A:

He came with – he was with the – he came when they were building the plant and he came to work for me as a tour guide and a photographer and a jack-of-all-trades. And he was wonderful and knew

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everybody and was just an enormous help. Uh, so I got two people the first day and a committee to work with to develop some information products and it worked out fine.

14:09:41

Q:

So what were your major challenges like the first year of your job?

14:09:47

A:

Oh, goodness. Uh, there were lots of them, some internal and most of them external. And I was dealing largely with the external, uh, community – with the news media and the community, FRESH, and that sort of thing. But part of the problem was, too, internally, because the unions were threatening to strike. And they ultimately did strike – they were out eight or ten weeks, something like that.

4:10:24

A:

Anything all, at all, that went wrong in the plant and everything, the media found out immediately. Uh, the employees were angry because all the information came down from, from upper management and there was no vehicle for them to give feedback back up the chain. So one of the first things we did – the very first thing we did was to take some studies, uh, some reports that had been by Congress – a hearing that had been done about Fernald.

4:11:03

A:

And there were about seven or eight binders about that thick (demonstrates with hands about six inches apart) that had information that was presented at that hearing. And we developed a little reading room, right there behind the desk, that used to be the desk there (nods head to the right) and we put those hearing reports in that reading room. And started a reading room at Fernald that people could come in and look at the information. Uh, that was the very first thing that we did.

4:11:32

A:

But, we also started a, a newspaper, uh, a, a plant newspaper. And we, we found forty employees to be reporters, to tell us what was going on and what should be going on uh, what they wanted to go on, what they were doing uh, in the plant so we could get some feedback from employees to uh, to management. Um, and we started that and uh, uh, it was a long hard process to, to overcome all that.

14:12:06

A:

Because everybody was angry, everybody was suspicious. Nobody trusted anyone uh, largely, and it was just difficult. And had to overcome all that. We did ultimately but it was a long hard fight.

Q:

Now we were talking earlier and you were telling me how there were just reporters and reporters and reporters. National news, local news, everybody was here. Um, on a typical day in those first early years, like how many people did you talk to in a typical day?

14:12:42

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A:

Uh, when I first came, uh, the, NLO, you have to understand then, that this process here was, was highly classified. Uh, uh, we weren't telling anyone how we made uranium, how we made uranium metal. Uh, so it was highly classified there and security was really tight. Uh, NL, NLO was not media oriented and I think even they would admit that today.

14:13:15

A:

Uh, there job was not, not to deal with the media or environmental restoration. Their job was to make uranium metal and that's what they did, as I've said before. Um, the, a typical day ya know, um, we, with all the things going wrong in the plant and the, the plant was old and dilapidated. They had not maintained it. They had not kept it up. Uh, and uh, it kept, it was always breaking down and leaking.

14:13:42

A:

And they were having crises out in the plant with radioactive materials in the floor. Uh, and leaks, and things going wrong, operational upsets. Uh, and we made a decision at my suggestion, and DOE concurred, that whatever happened, if we spilt a quart of oil or if we spilt a ton of uranium dust, that we'd call the media.

14:14:09

A:

No matter what it was we'd call them and tell them, "look this is what happened. We had a spill and this is what happened, if anybody was contaminated or, or anything." And we did that for a, for a long time uh, and it finally got to the point where they would say, "Pete, is this one of those things you, you just do routinely or is this serious?" And I'd say, "oh, this one doesn't matter much."

14:14:33

A:

Uh, or, "this one is pretty serious because we spilled five pounds of uranium or green salt in, in the floor." Uh, and we pretty soon built some, some trust with the media. Bob Walker was one of the main media people at the time. He was the uh, editor of the Hamilton Journal News. Uh, before I got here, he wasn't able to get any information cause they just wouldn't talk to him.

14:14:59

A:

Um, and uh, but we've, we've built some trust and credibility with, with the media, ultimately. Uh, but uh, they were, they were still hard on us. Especially *Channel 9*. Uh, *Channel 9* wouldn't take their foot off our neck, uh, so to speak. They wouldn't give us the time of day. No matter what we did that was good, it was, it was never reported and the bad things were, were reported so they were biased.

14:15:30

A:

Um, it was uh, it was frustrating early in the, in the process because there were so many things that were wrong. So many stories out there that uh, that needed to be told, but hadn't been told, and had to

come out sometime. And they were coming out and I was in the middle. Ya know, between the

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company and the media.

14:15:57

A:

And I was a former newspaperman. I wanted to, to level with them and tell them the truth, of course. And, and get it all out. Cause that's we're ever going to get it over with. It had to come out. The truth will out. And it did.

Q:

What was the hardest, you were the spokesperson at the time too, so you (Comment: Yes.) were in front of the cameras a lot. What was uh, the hardest interview you had to do?

14:16:24

A:

Well, one of the things I tried to do uh, uh, a PR man should not be the spokesman if he can help it. He should get uh, somebody who's an expert to-. I got people waving at me back there. Um, he should get somebody who's an expert in the particular area they're talking about or on a particular question they're asking to uh, to answer the question either do it if he can and get them ready to, to answer the question.

14:16:50

A:

Um, I, I didn't know as much about the plant as a spokesman should, because it was hard you know, to find out all the things that were goin' on in about this whole process and the history and all that in that uh, length of time. Uh, so I tried to get department heads to talk, and some of 'em wanted, and some of 'em would, and some of 'em wouldn't even think of it.

14:17:13

A:

Uh, the hardest interview I did was probably with, uh, well; it wasn't a TV interview. FRESH uh, when I got here, FRESH had just formed. And, and filed the \$300 million class action lawsuit. Uh, against NLO. They couldn't sue the government, so it was against NLO. Uh, and they were saying all these terrible things about NLO, and Fernald and, DOE and half of 'em were true, and half of 'em were not true.

14:17:51

A:

And there was lots of misinformation. But they were, they had monthly meetings, and I thought we ought to be communicating, and we weren't. This site was not communicating with FRESH. Uh, except to you know, make, hurling charges and that sort of thing, and denying charges. I wanted to go to their meeting, and talk to them. At first they didn't want me to come to their, to their meeting because they didn't trust me.

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A:

They didn't trust anybody from this site. Finally, they, they let me come to their meeting and, and give them a briefing about what was going on, you know, what had happened that day, or that week, or that month. Uh, and we started doin' that, and we did it, after that, we did it the entire time I was here.

Q:

Hang on just a second. (To cameraman: Are we getting that?) I just noticed that there was a tape rolling back there. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

(Cameraman: Is that what that is?)

Q:

(To cameraman: Yeah. It's up there. If you wanna pause, every hour or half hour or something, tell me.) Okay, great.

(Cameraman: We're up. Rolling)

14:18:54

Q:

So one of the things you had to deal with when you first got here of course was FRESH. Tell us about, again about um, your dealings when you first got here with FRESH and how they were feeling about the site, and how you had to deal with it.

14:19:05

A:

Well, first of all, when I arrived, there wasn't any communication with FRESH. There should have been uh, because they were the community, and the policy then was, they had just sued us for \$300 million, and obviously NLO didn't want to talk to them because they were suing 'em for \$300 million. Uh, so nobody was talkin' to FRESH, and they had just formed and they didn't have much information, much factual information about what was goin' on; it was all just rumors and innuendo.

14:19:35

A:

Um, and I wanted to talk to them. Uh, and I uh, I asked if I could come to the meeting, and they first said no because they didn't trust anybody from this site. Ultimately, uh, they said yes. And I went and did a little short briefing about some of the things that were happening and what we were trying to do. And they beat me up. I mean they beat me up bad.

14:20:02

A:

Not, not physically, but um, verbally beat me up. And uh, it was pretty traumatic. You know, that I was no good. I was lying. Uh, all that. But they needed information. And they were scared. They had, they had heard that there was groundwater in their wells. And that we had released uh, uranium dust into the air. And they were afraid, and they should have been afraid.

14:20:26

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A:

And they deserved information. This is a government project; paid for with taxpayer money and they couldn't get any information about it and couldn't get any answers. And they had a right to be angry, and scared. Uh, and I guess the attitude of, of listening to them, and paying attention to them, and trying to give them information ultimately uh, paid off, paid dividends a little bit.

14:20:53

A:

But we established a relationship. We started community roundtables. We would have six people from this, from, from Fernald meet with six people from, from the community. And sit down and get to know each other and build relationships, and talk to each other. Uh, and if they asked a question about, oh, "what does radioactivity do to your body?" we would have somebody, uh, Stu Hinnefeld there or somebody there that could answer that question.

14:21:23

A:

Uh, and ultimately, uh, the roundtables were more than anything else, I think were what turned it around with the, for the community. Because we had um, had them every month. And uh, made a difference. That was the thing where we established some talking points and some contacts, and got to where we could communicate a little bit. And when you communicate effectively, and everything, then you can work out problems, and that's what we did.

14:22:02

Q:

So those first public meetings, when the entire public was invited, (Comment: Oh my goodness) ____ Fernald, what was that like?

A:

My goodness, it was chaos and there was screaming, and yelling, and shouting, um, more than anything else. Uh, and there was not much communicating going on; it was just venting (puts hands up in the air) uh, and uh, shouting, and charges, and countercharges, and denials, and that sort of thing, it was terrible. And we finally got uh, experts to come in and coordinate these things but uh,

14:22:42

A:

First of all, you have to uh, if you're gonna hold a public meeting, then you're have to have some trust, and some, some kind of a relationship, yourself. You can't count on an expert, no matter how good he is at controlling anger and that sort of thing. We, it took a long time to get there. Public meetings are not the way to solve problems. They just aren't.

14:23:10

A:

Because you'll always have somebody in the audience who's posturing, and, or has an axe to grind, and uh, or some reason not to want you to be successful. Public meetings are not the way to do it. Small, group meetings are the way to solve problems and to learn to communicate with somebody who, that has a problem with you or with whom you have a problem – not public meetings.

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A:

And we were doing that for a long time, DOE's big on public meetings. Wrong – public meetings are not the way to go. And we don't do public meetings with my project now, in uh, in Alabama with the, with what we're doin'. We just don't do them. They just don't work. Sometimes they're quiet, required by law, and you have to stand up there and take the abuse, and all that.

14:24:04

A:

Now you have to take those uh, but the law's wrong. Public meetings about controversial projects like Fernald, and, and destroying chemical weapons like I'm doing now, with Westinghouse, public meetings are not the way to communicate that. You do it in small groups.

14:24:26

Q:

So how did you start to bring that concept to Fernald, then, if, if public meetings weren't quite working too well then. You mentioned small groups, how did you get that happening?

A:

Oh, well, we did it two ways, and I mentioned two ways we did it. Going to their meeting, uh, and, and taking people along who knew what they were talking about, who knew about the problem. Experts if you, if you will, uh, about radioactivity, and radiation, and what was happening here, and why uranium was being made here, and those kind of things.

14:25:08

A:

Uh, you try to anticipate what questions are gonna have. "What happens if there's radioactive contamination in my well?" Well, it'll kill ya, if you keep ingesting it. Uh, and we do, did that for their meetings, in trying to, to cater to them because they deserve some answers and some information. So we were doing that, and that helped ultimately.

14:25:35

A:

The roundtables helped enormously, uh, because you could sit for two hours with people, across from the table from ya. And uh, sooner or later, they got, they get tired o' callin' you liars, and, no-good sorry SOB's, and they you know, finally get to where you could talk a little bit. And that's where we started getting to know each other, and building relationships, and exchanging information, then communicating.

14:26:04

A:

And until you do that, until you start communicating effectively, then you don't solve problems. And uh, we did ultimately. One o' the things I was, I was proudest of, while I was here, is that the, we won a national award for the best community relations program; for all the things we did out there, for roundtables, and to going to their meetings, and the contributions to local organizations.

14:26:36

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A:

And we even started going to uh, the local township meetings, that the trustees held every two weeks, I believe. And giving them a little report about what we did. Uh, first of all, uh, they were suspicious of that because they thought we were gonna come and propaganda us, about what we were doing. Um, we did some o' that I guess, some propagandizing, telling the good things we were doing.

14:27:07

A:

But we also told the truth, and told about the bad things, and we had good friends on the trustees. Some o' the best friends I had in the Fernald community were trustees in the local townships. Uh, and I was proud o' that. I'm gonna go see 'em today (chuckles).

14:27:33

Q:

So now this site was under such a shroud of secrecy for so long. Um, was there still classified information that you couldn't divulge to the public at that time that you started your job here?

A:

Um-hmm, yeah, um, process was still classified. Uh, ah, there was lots of stuff still here at that time. They, they did away with much of that classification later on and everything, but when I first came, the security was really tight, and there were lots of things classified that I couldn't talk about.

14:28:11

A:

Half of it, I didn't know enough to talk about like the uranium, depleted uranium being used for tanks, and the bullets and that sort of thing. I didn't, I couldn't talk about that, it was still classified – may still, maybe, I don't know.

14:28:27

Q:

So when community members, or someone from the media, would ask you that question about something that was classified, what did you have to tell 'em?

A:

Well, I had to tell 'em. Like, "I don't know." or "I can't, it's classified, I can't tell ya." You don't want to say; "it's classified." If ya can help it, because to them, it's saying, "you don't wanna tell me." That's what it means, it's classified. And the government um, classifies things too quickly, too easily, you know, just to make it easier for them. And then releases it 30 years later, perhaps, or years later anyway.

14:29:06

A:

Uh, but if they asked a question that I couldn't, couldn't tell 'em, and I wasn't, I didn't have that high a security clearance myself. I did in the Marine Corps, but uh, but not here. Uh, so I didn't know about a lot o' the things, I didn't want to know about a lot o' the things here that were strictly classified. Just didn't know, and so I could honestly answer, "I don't know." I didn't know (laughs).

14:29:38

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Q:
So you didn't have a Q clearance.

A:
No, I didn't have a Q clearance, never did. Had a Secret clearance in the Marine Corps, but uh, but not a Q clearance here. Didn't want one. It's not good for uh, public information people to have security clearances because if you don't know, uh, you can say so honestly and without not telling the truth. I didn't want a Q clearance. Didn't try to get one, didn't want one (chuckles).

14:30:09

A:
If it's classified to the point to that I can't tell the community, I don't need that. I need to be able to tell people, reporters and the people in the community, what we're doing, what we're all about.

14:30:27

Q:
So how did your 11 years at a newspaper, your training as a, as a person at a newspaper, how did that carry over to your job at Fernald?

A:
You know, they used to ask me, my friends in the newspaper used to ask me, "how does it feel being on the other side?" I never did consider it being on the other side. I felt like, when I was doin' newspaper work, and I was a crusader, for, for lots of things, against bootleggers in my hometown, for instance. But I've always felt like I.
(Tape ends in mid-sentence)

Tape FLHP0207

15:01:08

Q:
I just saw her the other night; she came in for the public meetings, the cleanup progress briefings that we do now.

A:
Ah, stars, they still having public meetings.

Q:
Well, you know, they're really different now because we show people a lot of videos to what's going on out there, you know. We've just started doin' this way, where we just get a bunch o' video of the cleanup processes and we just say, "hey! Look, here's what's goin' on. This is what they're doin' at this project, and this is what they're doin' at this project."

15:01:30

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A:

Well, that's you know, that's better than just standing up there and saying, "here's what we're doing." And readin' 'em a bunch o' verbiage. (Comment: Or even showing slides.) And then takin' questions, yeah. Slides 're better than nothing, but when we first started; we didn't have anything to show.

Q:

Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, because it started with just talking. I remember when I first got here; the public meetings were all just like this.

(Tape stops and starts again)

Q:

Ready?

(Cameraman: Yeah)

Q:

Okay.

(Cameraman: Rolling)

Q:

Uh, we were talkin' about, a little bit about being on the other side, and having to answer to the media instead of being the media. If you could uh, just sort of cover that again how that happened.

15:02:00

A:

All right. Well, as I said, I was a newspaperman for uh, 11 years, and I was crusader when I was in newspaper work, and believed in the right of the media to, to know and that sort of thing, and I still do. Uh, and my newspaper friends used to ask me, "how does it feel to be on the other side?" Uh, I've never felt like I was on the other side because I felt like when I was in newspaper work, I was working in the public interest.

15:02:31

A:

And I certainly did here at Fernald and a lot of the other projects that I've worked on. And workin' in the public interest is trying to undest-, honestly tell the public. Most of the projects I've worked for have been public projects, paid for by the government, and taxpayers, and they have a right to know. Now sometimes I've had to fight uh, company or agency officials in order to do that, or argue with 'em or get in trouble with 'em for that (chuckles).

15:03:05

A:

But they have a right to know. And it's not cla-, you know, most of it, most o' the time it wasn't classified and everything, they just didn't want everybody, the public to know, because it was not in

their interest and good for them, and embarrassing to them at times. Uh, so. You have to fight both

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sides sometimes (laughs).

15:03:33

Q:

So then tell us a little bit about um, the transition between NLO and Westinghouse when Westinghouse came in.

A:

Oh, it was really hard. Uh, NLO had been here 34 years, making uranium that was their job. Uh, their job was not to, to clean up the site, and to do environmental restoration, or to communicate with the community as we talked about. Even though they tried to get money to make some repairs and do some cleanup and stop doing some o' the bad things that were going on.

15:04:15

A:

But they were in disrepute, when Westinghouse came in. You know, they'd been sued for \$300 million; they had finally acknowledged that there was environmental contamination off site, in the groundwater, in the. They were the bad guys. They weren't really, but the perception is that they were bad guys. And then Westinghouse came in, and they were the white-hats, so to speak.

15:04:53

A:

One o' the hardest days I had here, and I wrote a story about it in a little newsletter that we started. Uh, was the NLO people leaving, and a lot of 'em, even though they weren't retirement age, a lot of 'em were, were out of a job, and, and retiring early, and everything, because NLO was finally leaving Fernald after 34 years. They were the only company that had been here during that whole time.

15:05:19

A:

And Westinghouse was being here; they brought in a whole new line of management. Fortunately, they kept me, but they didn't keep the division heads for NLO. I think they kept, they might a kept one. Uh, they kept some o' the top supervisors in the plant, but not the top, not the top division heads, as we call 'em. Uh, and it was hard, to see those people, go under those circumstances.

15:05:50

A:

Uh, to, to, to be without a job, to retire early without wanting to, and to leave in disrepute, uh, when they were, they were good citizens. You know, I saw three companies here, at uh, at Fernald, and even though NLO probably gave me a harder time than anybody. Uh, it was because of the circumstances, but in terms of being qualified for the job they do, and staying on schedule, and below cost, and doing their job well, NLO probably did it better than anybody, I think.

15:06:37

A:

Uh, and then Westinghouse came, of course, when Westinghouse came, uh, Westinghouse Electric Company had the first public relations department, in this country. George Westinghouse was in a battle with uh, what's the guy's name? Uh, oh, well, anyway, George Westinghouse started the first

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public relations department. So they believed in being open and honest about what they were doing.

15:07:12

A:

Specially since they were operating a government plant, and my policy problems went away, completely the day they walked in. Uh, and, and got lots of support to do uh, public information, and public relations, and com-, community relations kinds of things. Uh, Bruce Boswell, the new president, uh, didn't do much else the first year he was here, except interviews from me.

15:07:42

A:

You know, talking to people, going to meetings, talking to reporters, uh, that sort of thing. He did more of that than he did anything else. Needed to. Just about had to, to get some information about what we were doing. He turned out to be well liked by the community. Uh, but had, had trouble with the DOE because he shut the plant down ultimately. But it was hard.

15:08:18

A:

The NLO people left uh, under a cloud, so to speak, uh, and, and it was a shame that, that they didn't get more credit than they did, and that they got blamed for the bad things that happened when they really weren't to blame. I didn't think, still don't, know that, now I know they weren't to blame. Who's to blame?

15:08:45

A:

The folks that didn't clean up this place and keep it from leaking and polluting, back in, in all those early years, they're the ones that we're to blame, whoever they are – faceless government officials (laughs).

15:09:04

Q:

This something I really, we really haven't talked about yet is the lawsuit. Um, what kind of public relation's nightmares did both the lawsuits create for you while you were here?

A:

Oh, Lord. Uh, well, they had, they had just filed this class-action lawsuit just not long before I arrived. And of course, when, when, when a company that doesn't like to deal with the, with the media and the community anyway, when they have no experience dealing with the media and the community anyway.

15:09:39

A:

And then they get sued for \$300 million, you can imagine how much they're gonna shut up then. So, the policy was, don't say much of anything. We, we did finally get a policy of, of calling the media when we spill, when something went wrong with the plant. Uh, an operation got ____ spilled or something like that.

15:10:03

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A:

But the policy pretty well was “well, you can’t say anything, ‘cause we’re sued for \$300 million.” But, at the same time, I was speaking for DOE, and they couldn’t be sued, and they wanted to get information out, and get this nightmare over with. So it was, it was a conflict about what I could say, and what I couldn’t say, that, what might hurt NLO and impact on their lawsuit, and that sort o’ thing.

15:10:37

A:

Turned out, the biggest media hassle that was to come a few years later came as a result of that, that conflict. NLO being sued and not DOE, and yet DOE doing the talking. And I’ll tell you about that when you ask me (laughs).

15:11:04

Q:

How hard was it to, win the NLO employees over when Westinghouse came in, I mean, was that like of a public relations kind of thing you had to deal with, too? I just thought of that.

A:

Say it again?

Q:

Winning over the NLO employees, the people that did stay that were from NLO. Getting uh, getting Westinghouse in there, and getting them to understand Westinghouse.

A:

Uh, the NLO people, well, there were really two groups. There were the union people that worked when NLO was here, and the, and the non-union folks, and that was, it was pretty much a head butting session with a lot of ‘em. The uh, the non-union NLO people were the tightest group and the most loyal group and supportive of each other of any group I’ve ever seen.

15:11:55

A:

Uh, they’d been here for years, workin’ together. Uh, and they kind o’ resented when, when the end came, and NLO gave up this contract, they thought this they were robbed. They didn’t, they didn’t bid.

They didn’t, they didn’t bid because they knew they wouldn’t get it. Wouldn’t get the contract, and they didn’t want that hassle any more.

15:12:22

A:

But when they, when the NLO left, and the top managers all left, obviously, the people who worked for them were resentful. Because NLO was blamed, and NLO people had lost their jobs and NLO’s reputation was shot. And all those people who had worked there for all those years for NLO were understandably unhappy with all that.

15:12:52

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A:

And it took a while for Westinghouse, who only brought in 20 or 30 people, and the rest o' the people here were NLO people, had been for 30 years. And it took a long time for o-, for Westinghouse to win over these folks. And, and convince 'em that they were gonna try to clean up, that they were gonna have jobs as long as there were jobs here, and that Westinghouse was a pretty good company after all.

15:13:23

A:

Westinghouse is the best people-company uh, that I've ever worked for, in 35 years in this business, media, and otherwise. They're a wonderful people-company; still are. That's why I'm still workin' for 'em. I, I'm retired from here, and I don't have to work any more, but I'm still workin' because I like to work for Westinghouse.

15:13:43

A:

And I like what we're doing, in another project down there to clean up uh, a government mess. And uh, and I like that, and it is a government mess (chuckles).

Q:

That makes me think of a question, too. If uh, since you had to do with so much that happened at Fernald, in dealing with uh, the anger of the public um, here, if you could go back 30 or 40 years and say anything to the Atomic Energy Commission folks, what would you tell them?

15:14:15

A:

Uh, don't pollute. You know, I know you were in a cold war, and you were tryin' to win the Cold War, and you did, ultimately, and I understand that. But don't put people in uh, the community at risk, from uh, radioactive contamination and pollution, and that sort of thing. And don't lie, about what's going on at your facility. Don't tell, don't tell, things that're not, you don't wanna say things that're not true.

15:14:57

A:

Tell the community everything you can. They'll be supportive, they always were supportive of the, of this plant, but tell them what you can. And don't fool 'em, don't try to fool 'em, and, and hold things back from them. But if I were talkin' to the folks runnin' this plant, "fix this plant. Don't let it release uranium dust. Don't let it release uh, uranium into the wa-, into the groundwater. Fix it."

15:15:33

A:

"Uh, don't put the people in this community at risk, and that's what ya did. And I don't know whether there's a higher incidence of cancer in this community or not, as a result, uh, I don't know if there's a higher incidence or not. If there is, I don't know whether it was a result of this plant being here or not.

15:15:55

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A:

Uh, but I know there was lots of contamination, still is. And lots of pollution, and that's a dirty word, uh, from this plant, in this community, and it's not right. It's not, it's just wrong."

Q:

Good. Um, you had mentioned about, the hardest part was (chuckling) the DOE saying one thing, and NLO and Westinghouse kind of in disagreement in front of the media, what kind of uh, experiences did you have with that?

15:16:46

A:

Uh, NLO, being sued for \$300 million, and if they lost, they, they had an agreement that the government would pay uh, if they lost the suit law all right. I've forgotten the term for it now, but uh, the government would pay if they lost the, if they lost the suit. But they always felt like DOE was saying things that hurt their cause, before their trial was held. It was years, 3 or 4 years before the trial ever came to, uh; the case ever came to trial.

15:17:34

A:

Uh, the biggest media hassle came about, 3 years after, after NLO had left, and, and Westinghouse was here. And during that 3 years, uh, we had done some o' the things I had talked about earlier. We had done some community round tables, and, and begun talking to the media, and had to, a public affairs program going. Goin' to their meetings, building roundtables, answering questions, giving them information that they deserved.

15:18:11

A:

Uh, and we were kind o' pulling this place, out of the mire, so to speak, 3 years later. We had 15 or 20 people working in Public Affairs by that time. Uh, and we were sitting around one day, and some radio station said, "the Department of Energy has admitted uh, that it told Fernald to go ahead and produce, never mind the fact that uh, it was contaminating the community."

15:18:47

A:

And I thought, "what in the, where in the world did that come from?" We had, we hadn't heard nothing about that. Those lawyers were negotiating in Washington, trying to settle this case. And DOE admitted, in this nego-, this negotiation session, that they told NLO to go ahead and produce, irrespective of what happened environmentally, whether it was uranium contamination in the air, or in the water, or in the plant.

15:19:22

A:

Uh, and the employees had some rights, too, but they told, said, "go ahead and produce. It was the Cold War, and they had to win the Cold War, and produce by all means, at all costs." And here came every large media outlet in this country. And I'm talkin' about the very top ones, the three big

networks; FOX wasn't here then. Uh, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Chicago

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Tribune, all the magazines, Newsweek, Time.

15:19:54

A:

Uh, we had, by that time, I had a, Bob Walker, from the Hamilton Journal News, who was the managing editor there was working for me here doing media relations, and he knew the media. And he was talking with them every day, and answering their questions and giving them information. And we had 150 reporters and photographers coming to this site in 10 days. All of 'em looking for interviews.

15:20:27

A:

And I'm talkin' about the toughest, biggest, meanest reporters in this country. All of 'em looking for interviews and looking for pictures about, of this plant. Um, they all got their interviews; either with me, or Jim Reafsnyder, or whoever they wanted to talk to, and they all got their pictures. But, while we had kind o' started to pull out of, of the mire, so to speak, and get the clouds from over our head, we were right back in the same old thing again, and having to do it all over again.

15:21:07

A:

Then, because we were the site where they said, "don't worry about anything except producing uranium and winning the Cold War." That's what they said (chuckles).

Q:

Oh my gosh.

15:21:27

A:

Yeah. There's probably some very interesting clips back there in about, in 1988, and about, I forgot, it was about May or so. Toughest interviews you ever saw. Uh, especially from foreign press, and especially from German press. And Jim Reafsnyder, to his everlasting credit, sat there and let 'em beat on him for a week and a half.

15:21:56

A:

And did those interviews, and uh, admitted all that DOE had done, and that it was, was their fault, and that NLO wasn't quite as bad as they thought they were after all. And Westinghouse was kind o' out of it, out of it. It was between NLO and DOE and the media at that point.

15:22:29

Q:

So with that round of interviews that you had to do with like national, national press, what was the hardest one you had to do?

15:22:38

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A:

Uh, the German TV crew. Kind o' the Green Party Press from, from Germany, just scandalous questions (chuckles). Uh, outrageous charges and things made to Jim Reafsnyder, the, the DOE manager at the time. The others, were hard, you know, "did you really tell NLO to go ahead and produce uranium when you knew that it was gonna mean pollution and radioactive contamination in this community?" "Yeah, that's what we did."

15:23:25

A:

Ah, they were tryin' to do, they did that, the government couldn't be sued. They were tryin' to get NLO out of, of the, of the suit, the \$300 million suit. The end result of all that, I'm sure you know by now, was they found for FRESH, FRESH was the, was the plaintiff. They found for FRESH, and I've forgotten what the, uh, the award was, it was a hundred somethin' million dollars. I f-, I've forgotten the amount.

15:24:03

Q:

Now they settled out of court, actually. (Comment: Yes) What was your reaction to them going ahead and settling out of court?

A:

I think they should have. I think they should've gotten it over any way they could. Uh, and uh, they did settle out of court. And again, I've forgotten the exact amount, I thought I would never forget, but I did. Uh, but I think they should've settled it, and gotten it over with, because they were gonna lose, the government was gonna lose, because they were guilty (laughs).

15:24:42

Q:

Wow. That was uh, crazy times. Um, during all this, the workers also filed a lawsuit, and um, the union was quite upset with what had gone on here at Fernald, and the protection and safety of their workers and those types of things. Um, what were your responsibilities towards the unions, and what types of things happened with them while you were um, in the midst of all this?

15:25:12

A:

Yeah, I got off to a really bad start with the union, when I first came here. I was to be the spokesman for NLO, and we had reporters beating on us for information. And the NLO management wanted me to go out and say that the union was not tellin the truth about all the charges they were making, and that they were just doing this in order to win a bigger elaborate contract, and bigger benefits.

15:25:48

A:

So, I went out and delivered a party line, the message from NLO. Ah, turns out in retrospect the union was more right than uh, than the company was later on. I told Gene Branham that this morning. Yeah (chuckles).

15:26:19

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Q:

So what was their reaction to the party line? (Comment: What was?) The union's reaction to the party line.

A:

Oh, they wanted me fired. They, they, when Westinghouse came, they tried to get Westinghouse to fire me, because I had come here and 2, 2 days after I arrived, I was out saying how bad the union was. And I was. I was saying that. That was the party line from the company. It wasn't my attitude. I was raised on union bread.

15:26:52

A:

Uh, it wasn't uh, the way I felt, but it was my job to go out there and represent the company and what they were saying about the situation. Uh, the uh, it was wrong. It was a mistake I made. And I did it, went out without knowing what the real facts were (chuckles).

15:27:23

Q:

Let's get a little bit into um, shutdown, in 1989 they decided to shut down the plant. Tell us about that day.

A:

Unbelievable – absolutely unbelievable. Bruce Boswell? The president of Westinghouse? For all that times, from, from when they got the contract in January of '96 until the, '88, '80, '89, I guess, whenever that was. They were tryin' to clean up the plant and to operate the plant at the same time. You couldn't do that, because it was always breaking down, and you were having spills and releases, and upsets out there all the time. It was too old, hadn't maintained it.

15:28:14

A:

Uh, and you couldn't clean it up and run it at the same time. At least I didn't think ya could, and neither did Bruce Boswell. So he came in one day and said, "shut it down. Stop it. Right now." And he caught considerable grief for that, from the government, from DOE and from lots of folks. But you know, looking back now, and isn't hindsight wonderful? It was probably the only way he could have.

15:28:48

A:

Because if he had requested permission to stop production, if he had gotten it at all, it probably, it would have taken months uh, to do it. And while he, we wound up with material in the, in the pipes and in the process, and that sort of thing, um, that had, was a problem to clean up later. That's probably the only way he could have stopped it. Was just say, "shut off the switch. Stop it. Right now. Shut it down, stop."

Q:

We're gonna pause and change tapes again.

Tape FLHP0208

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16:01:00

Q:

Just making sure.

A:

See all these faces that I don't remember names for.

Q:

Oh, I know (laughs) that would be hard. Well, since this is the Cold War plant, it's like a relic of the Cold War, let's talk a little bit about the Cold War. Uh, what was the typical American's mindset during the Cold War, And you were sort of, you came to Fernald right at sort of the height of the second peak of the Cold War. Um, just tell us a little bit about that in relation to history.

16:01:36

A:

Well, first of all, most of the people working here, a lot of the people working here had been in the Army, and had gotten a job here uh, after their military time, and maybe because, maybe their military time helped. So they were loyal, patriotic, good citizens who, working here. Uh, that should be said. The NLO people were a large; a lot of 'em had been in, the military, World War II, Korea, whatever.

16:02:12

A:

Um, and, and the mindset from the community, I mean, I mean from the public list, "win. We can't afford to lose." Um, and, and I guess that's why DOE was saying the things the way they did. You know, keep on producing uranium metal because this is the starting point for the weapons program in this country. And we have to make sure that we have a deterrent, and we have the capability to respond to anybody who attacks us.

16:02:51

A:

Uh, and that's the same thing that I'm doing now. I'm now in a project now where we're destroying chemical weapons, nerve gas, and mustard that was manufactured uh, as a deterrent, and stored for, since 1961. And we're building a plant to burn chemical weapons. Now that's controversial. And Westinghouse is now getting, you know, kind of the kind of blame that NLO did here for operating this plant.

16:03:21

A:

Uh, but uh, a lot of things were done in the interest of winning the Cold War that uh, that we're now paying the price for. But we won the Cold War. And it's better by far to win a cold war, than any other kind. I'm tellin' ya, 'cause no matter how expensive it is, or, or what the results are, it's better than being invaded or, or having another World War II or even Korea or Vietnam or something.

16:03:55

A:

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Um, I was lucky. I was in the Marine Corps between Korea and Vietnam. I didn't get shot at, but a lot o' people, including my brothers, not only got shot at, but got shot, or killed. I lost a nephew in Vietnam. So I know what it's like, or what it means. Um, whatever was done to win the Cold War, and it's, look back now and say, "it's terrible, like Fernald." but it's better than, bein' invaded, livin' under some, somebody else. That, that's what ya have to think about.

16:04:44

Q:

And how did Fernald help to further America's goals at that time?

A:

I don't think there's any question that it did. Um, Fernald was the starting point for the nuclear weapons program. Uh, and while we didn't use nuclear weapons after World War II. Uh, and after Fernald started, we certainly had the capability to, and everybody uh, that we were contending with, Russia, China, Korea, North Korea.

16:05:18

A:

Uh, they certainly knew that we had the capability to respond and wipe them out. And the way that capability was created and maintained, was people working here at this plant. Uh, starting making uranium metal to go to other places to be used in uh, reactors there to make uh, nuclear weapons. Nobody likes nuclear weapons, but everybody else, a lot; a lot of other people had them.

16:06:02

A:

Uh, and if we hadn't had them, and had the capability, we might not be Americans now, we might be somethin' else. So it was important. And the people here, uh, were proud of that. That they had contributed, not only as military people themselves, but a lot of 'em, but as Cold War soldiers or veterans as well. Uh, and uh, had made a contribution that way, and that's, that's the absolute truth.

16:06:33

A:

People at Fernald did, and now, you know, people put down Fernald and say, "oh, you work at Fernald, or you worked at Fernald. Yuck. That nasty old nuclear plant out there." Yeah, it was that. But it was also the place that helped us maintained a defense for this country, and a deterrent against other people takin' us over. And they might have, had we not had that capability.

16:07:12

A:

Uh, I was proud, I'm proud o' my 11 years at Fernald, but there're people here who have 35 and, years and longer, who have a lot more reason to be proud than I do. Because they worked hard uh, to make uranium and that's what it took, and that's what it was all about.

Q:

So what're you most proud of from your 11 years here? What's your sort of crowning achievement

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that you feel?

16:07:43

A:

Um, oh, lots of things. Um, uh, we won a national award for the best community relations program, in the country, while I was here. I, I'm proudest of the fact that we were able to give this community information, and respond for their request for information, and answer their questions. That's what we were supposed to do.

16:08:17

A:

Um, I'm glad we kind o' turned it around, uh, and made it a lot easier for Fluor Daniel to come in and operate this facility, because by this time, we had relationships established with Lisa Crawford, and with the trustees, and with media, and, and those kind of things. I'm proud of that. There's some things that I'm not so proud of, like all the bad headlines that, and that sort of thing.

16:08:54

A:

Uh, but headlines are not permanent relationships are. When I'm back here today, you know, there's scores of people, some whose names I've forgotten are comin' up to me and saying, "hello." and that's the thing, I had a relationship with 'em when I was here. And uh, and if I might not remember their name after 4 years without seeing 'em, it's very important to uh, to have good relationships with people.

16:09:32

A:

To work with 'em, to understand 'em, to believe in them, and to trust 'em and be loyal to them. And that's, that's the way we won here. Building relationships, good relationships with people. One of the things too that we did here was start and Envoy Program. And I started it with a lot of help at DOE's suggestion by the way.

16:10:05

A:

It was DOE's suggestion that we start this Envoy Program. And the Envoy's Program was ah, to take employees who work here and ah, have them ah, go out in the community to civic clubs, to their civic clubs. But to the organization that the belonged to or that they knew about and tell them what was going on and answer questions and that sort of thing.

16:10:36

A:

We had 40 Envoy's at one time going out and doing that. We'd give them information, we didn't tell them what to say. We told them what was happening in the plant and what the latest thing was and that sort of thing. They'd go out and do it in their own words to their friends, to the people they knew and that they had a relationship with and to whom they had a creditability with.

16:11:01

A:

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That helped as well. The Envoy Program was a good program too and I understand that it's still going on ah, here. I'd like to find out more about it since I've been gone 4 years. Ah, I was proud of that. Ah, I suppose those are the things that I'm proudest of.

16:11:26

Q:

So tell us a little bit about moving into, from ah, process years into cleanup years. Um, what was that like, after we talked a little bit about shut down and production? But what was it like when they finally, after they shut the plant down, and said okay we're gonna clean it up?

16:11:47

A:

Ah, you know I don't ah, I don't remember my job being all that much different from, from when we were producing and when we stopped producing and were cleaning up. Ah, because I was still in the community and ah, and the media, what we were doing. And it was just we were just doing different things in a different kind of way. I think it was a little easier.

16:12:18

A:

Ah, once we started, we stopped production and started doing cleanup, because ah, we had a positive story to tell all together. And we didn't have to talk about operational upsets and spills and that sort of thing as much as we had before. But ah, I don't know that ah, ah, it was all that much different from my standpoint, from a public affairs standpoint.

16:12:47

A:

We were still telling people what we were doing and talking to people so wasn't all that much different.

Q:

Now they're tearing the site down pretty fast, buildings are coming down left and right, and ah, sort of as a citizen of the world, what would you like to see done with the land here when it's all done?

16:13:06

A:

Oh, I don't know. Uh, I think that's up to the community. The community should decide that. Whatever they need most, and whatever they want most. Uh, they put up with this risk, and that's what it's been, risk and, and headache for all these years, and they should have a right to decide what happens to the plant. Whether it becomes a park, uh, whether it becomes a uh, whatever.

16:13:34

A:

It should be a community decision from the trustees and from FRESH. Uh, FRESH deserves an enormous amount of credit – an absolutely enormous amount of credit. Uh, it was mostly women, FRESH was, when they, when they first started out. It was only a couple o' men in it. And they went

to meetings for years, and years, and years, pushing DOE, and NLO, and Westinghouse, and Fluor Daniel to, to give them information and do the right thing.

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16:14:18

A:

Uh, and they never complained, about having to go to, to those meetings and sit there for 2 or 2½ hours, and listen to gobble-de-gook. And, and pressure and push for questions and that sort o' thing. And Lisa Crawford, and Vicki Dastillung, and Edwa Yokum, and, and the people the members of FRESH and everything, deserve an enormous amount of credit for this place being a lot better now than it, than it was before.

16:14:46

A:

Uh, I just can't tell ya how much respect and how much admiration I have for them. They used to beat the fire out o' me, when I first started goin' in there and started talkin' to them and everything. But they uh, I just can't imagine anybody with more dedication than they had to get this place cleaned up, and, and, and not being a risk to this community for their children and grandchildren.

16:15:19

A:

Um, I got; extremely mad at 'em hundreds of times. Looking back now, um, I just have the absolute, utmost respect and admiration for the things they were doin', because they worked hard, to make things right, and it, it's happening (laughs).

16:15:50

Q:

So, how did this job, affect, your personal life? 'Cause there were a lot of evenings, and weekends, 'especially at the beginning.

A:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. When I first came, uh, there was, there were so many spills, and upsets, and problems, and breakdowns, uh, going on that uh, I'd be out here 2 or three nights a week, sometimes. Uh, Weldon Adams would be here with me, generally, tryin' to find out what happened. And they we'd call the media, and, and, tell them what happened, generally.

16:15:37

A:

Uh, so it was hard then, but uh, they pretty well told me what it was gonna be like before I, I got into it. There was some things that I didn't know about, but they couldn't tell me absolutely everything. I didn't know about the thorium being here, for instance. But they uh, pretty well laid it all out for me before I got here. I wasn't all that surprised, so I didn't walk into it blind (laughing).

16:17:07

A:

Sometimes I wondered why I walked into it. But um, it's okay (laughing harder now) I'm having a kiss blown at me (laughing).

Q:

Now when anything happens, sure.

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(Tape stops and begins again)

16:17:34

Q:

Um, gosh, I forgot what I was gonna ask you. Oh. Uh, the, now when anything happens on site, we have a whole um, com-, Communications Center to get the word out to the media, and to anybody who needs to know. Um, how instrumental were you in helping set that whole thing up?

A:

Well, I uh, I wasn't here very long with, with Fluor Daniel because I took early retirement and left not too long after Fluor Daniel came here, so I don't claim any credit for setting up any Communication Center. Uh, I hope, I hope I had something to do with the, with setting an attitude about Fernald, and a policy about Fernald responding to the community and answering questions.

16:18:28

A:

And tryin' to be open and honest about what we were doing here. Uh, but nevertheless, it doesn't matter who gets the credit, uh, it's, it's happening it's being cleaned up, and I hope gonna be cleaned up and shut down, and given to the community or whatever. Um, but I don't take any credit for a Communications Center, but I hope I had something to do with a policy that started all of this. Hope I did.

Q:

Is there anything that we didn't cover that you want to cover – anything that you want to add?

A:

(Pauses) Um, no. I think, I think that pretty well covered it. I'd like to talk about uh, Jo Ann, but I better not.

16:19:16

Q:

Okay. I was gonna ask you that question, but I didn't know if you wanted to or not, so. Okay uh, we need to get nat sound. So if we could have sort of quiet for just 10 seconds, we'll be set.

(Cameraman: Rolling. End of tape)