

Ironworkers Documentation Project: AMERICA WORKS
AUDIO LOG FORM

Interviewer's recording no(s): AWP00172_SR01

Contact: William W. (Bill) Kerwin

Interviewer: Jim Leary

Interview:

Date: Friday, July 8, 2011

Place: Basement of Kerwin home

Other people present: nobody

Background noise: minimal

Equipment used: (audio recorder brand and model; microphone(s), brand(s), model(s))
Marantz professional PMD 661 digital recorder; Audio Technica C87 condenser microphone

Recording medium used: Kingsport 2 gigabyte SD[Secure Digital]memory card 362.4 megabytes, uncompressed WAV format

Recording engineer: Leary

Summary description of audio interview contents:

Now retired, Kerwin talks about his experiences as an ironworker.

Audio Interview Contents: Bill Kerwin

Time	Topic
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0:02	Announcement, initial question—when and where born, how you got into ironworkers trade?
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0:31	I was born and raised on Charter Street in Madison. I went to St. James Grade School. Graduated from there. I went to West High School. After West High School I worked for the city a little bit. And then I got drafted by the army. Went in and served my two years there, and then two years in the reserves. I was working for the city. There was three, four friends of mine that were ironworkers. So they told me to go down to the hall and apply. And I did. It wasn't long I got hired. [Who were your buddies?] Charles Gorey and Jim Sielehr. They were ahead of me, but they were apprentices at the time. We were all the same age. [High school together?] No, they were from the old neighborhood. I hung around the The Bush a lot. Lot of people'd say, "The Bush!" y'know. But I could go in the Bush because of my friends. Lot of people wouldn't
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go there at night . You've heard about the Bush? [Yeah, it seemed like a great place.] It was! Back in them days nobody locked their doors. We'd just go knock on the doors. "C'mon in! How are ya?" And "Is so and so home?" And that's the way it was in the old days. Then I became an ironworker in March of '66, served my apprenticeship, did my years, my hours and stuff. Then I was hired by Theodore Kupfer's. I worked there for 28 years.

2:04 [Any in your family in the building trades?] No. My father was the lieutenant on the fire department and my brother went to college. My other ones worked at Oscar Mayer's and that was it. [What attracted you to the trade?] When I worked for the city, a friend of mine, Smiley Weiner, was my foreman and he said, "You know, you don't want to work for the city. Got to get out of here. Get in the trades. Get out. You're not going to make a decent living working for the city." This was 1965. I went down to the Labor Temple, signed up for the plumbers and I signed up for the ironworkers. The ironworkers called me. That's how I got in.

2:54 [Tell me about Kupfer Ironworks. What kind of a place...] Kupfer's was a great place. There were a lot of great friends that worked there. We were all apprentices. I could name you a dozen guys who were all there. We all got along good and it was a great place to work and they kept you busy. You didn't get laid off much. It was fine. Everyone was friends there. You had great Christmas parties. A lot of nice times, a lot of parties. But it's too bad. Most of them are dead now. I miss... I happened to see my old superintendent, Bob Benton, three days before he died. He was kind of one of the ones that took me under his wings at Kupfer's and made me a good ironworker. I became foreman and worked here and worked at... My favorite place was at the Kohl Center. I worked at the Kohl Center for 16 months and got out of there and went to Badgerland. I finished up my career with Badgerland. I was 63 years old and I said it was time to quit. That was it.

4:06 [Tell me a little bit about the old timers with whom you were in the trenches...] You couldn't believe those old timers. They knew everything. I mean, there was Syd Erstad. Dick Higby was my really...like my hero. Dick took me under his wing and taught me very well how to be an ironworker and how to be safe, how to figure out the blueprint--and George Bunders and George's Dad, Bob Benton, Jim Hein and Stub--all these great guys who worked for Kupfer's back then. You just can't remember them all -- they were all so good. It was fun. I enjoyed that, all those years... [When you first started out, what kind of work were you doing and how did you...] The first day I went on the job I started my career at James Madison Memorial. I went to work. Syd Erstad was the foreman and Norm Lenzer was there and Everett Erstad and Norm Brown and a couple other guys that I don't quite remember. But here I come on the job, a green horn, right out of the hall. First day on the job, some guy says, "Put a choker on that beam." I looked at him like, "What??? Put a choker? What a minute! This is my first day!" LAUGHS Those old time ironworkers, they didn't have patience. "What do you mean you don't know. Get over here now and I'll show you." You had to make sure it was completely centered so it would go up right for the connectors and stuff. I learned a lot in the first week. [So a lot of language, a lot of terms there?] Well, you know, construction workers had their own way of saying things. Language wasn't really clean language. They weren't afraid of speak their word, them old timers. Them old timers made the union what it was. You did your best. I mean, like, "Get up and crawl on that iron!" That was on my third day. I mean, I didn't want to get up there

and start walking around. I was kind of green but I learned. I got along good. So then I stayed with Syd for about a year. He was the foreman that I stayed with, going to different schools and stuff. Then when you work for Kupfer's, they had maybe 6-7 foremen who all had trucks. You get farmed out with what they say. You go work for this guy a day and you work for that guy a day. That's what I did and I enjoyed it – it was fun!

7:00 [Can you tell me about some of the different parts of the trade, like welding or rod busting or connecting... Your early experiences with some of those.] My early experiences...I was kind of a layout man for bar joist. You measure them out, lay them out and you didn't do much welding until you went to school and got to be a pretty good welder. I was a certified welder once and then I never went back and re-did it. But I could weld. Then you get up there and all of a sudden I became a connector, which I really loved. Sit up there and grab the iron and cut loose. Move on to the next piece and that was fun. Never did much rod busting. Never did. I did a little bit at the Kohl Center and a few bridge decks, but most of Kupfer's was all structural work. We were always doing this and doing that. One time I worked on a TV tower, WISC-TV tower. I changed some light bulbs and some welding, tack a piece on there. It was like a four day job. It didn't last long but it was exciting to climb way up there. I could almost see Mount Horeb from up there – it was really great to see. I should have had binoculars but I never did.

8:27 [Tell me about being a connector. What did you wear, what kind of gear did you have?] Well, you wear your structural belt, had a bag full of bolts. You sit up there on the iron and they'd swing a piece up and you'd grab it. You got to make sure that you got it, end to end, because most iron was numbered and the numbers went a certain way according to the blueprint. A piece swung over and you grabbed and stuck the spud wrench on it. Try to hold it. Stick one bolt in and snug it up. The other guy gets his...crawl out, unhook it and wait for the next piece. [How important is it...because you work as a team...] Right, you had a partner. [Can you tell me about a favorite partner and some of the teamwork that's involved?] Well, you know, Norm Brown and I got along good. We were kind of both young apprentices. I liked connecting with Norm. He was a good guy. There were so many different guys you worked with. Every day you're on a different job and someone needs help, this and that. According to the union rules, there are five guys to a crew and so you just switched around jobs and connected iron with guys. Doing gymnasiums was probably the most fun. Great big long high trusses and put in the big bar joists. You got to set them in time to make sure they didn't tip over. That was kind of exciting, putting them out there. [Did the connectors have a certain sense of identity, a high status thing?] Yeah, you know, guys used to say, "I'm a connector, that's all I do." I became a foreman for Kupfer's for awhile, traveling out of town to do work. You hire men out of their local. Down in Illinois with Ed Smith, we had some crews down there. We did some connecting and stuff. Ed was my ground man and I was the foreman. The guys we had out of Chicago were connectors. Well, we got the iron all connected and everything and they said, "Well, we would like our paycheck." And I told them we had a lot of work to do. "No, no, we're connectors. That's it. We don't do detail work. We don't. We're high flyers." Okay. That's the way it was. You paid them off and they left. But ironworkers were pretty set in their ways. They're pretty hard headed guys. There were guys that wouldn't tie a box and there were guys who wouldn't connect or do structural because they didn't like height. That's the way it was.

11:20 [Can you talk about going up...] As you go up, build floor after floor... [I mean your own experiences because... The challenge to get up high at first. Did you have to overcome anything in terms of balance or...] I was never scared of heights and stuff. A lot of times I thought, "Gee, I have to be careful. I don't want to fall." You always had that in your mind. You sit back there and took your time and didn't hurry. I was very lucky and never fell, never really got seriously hurt or anything. But...yeah... I worked on buildings where you work your way up. You start on the ground floor and go up and up and up. You get up there and the higher you get, I think the safer you get. Basically, some guys would say, "Well, I was..." I know. I was an ironworker. You use a little more caution, you're a little more safer. The higher you get, the more safety conscious you get.

12:40 [In the older days, did guys used to have a drink to steady their nerves or anything like that?] Well, I hate to bring that up but you know... I remember when there was a bottle stashed around on the job. They were old time ironworkers, you know? They were set in their ways. Back in the winter time, go have a coffee break, right? Give me B&B. You'd look, and I was just a young kid. I didn't know what the hell B&B was. Because black and brandy coffee break. That's the way it was when it was cold and stuff. Things have changed today with the new rules and regulations. All the drug testing that goes on now and stuff. Basically, them old guys knew what they were doing. They were great guys. You can not just... anyone ever tell you that the old time ironworkers, them hard headed so and sos, they would teach you if they asked. They were really good guys, deep down.

13:57 [Can you tell me about any who were particular characters that there might be a story or two about?] Well, my favorite guy I used to work with was Norm Lenzer. This guy was a great ironworker. Probably other ironworkers told you about Norm. This guy would do a handstand on the beam just to show you he could do it. And this man was probably one of the smarter guys I worked with who could really teach you something if you wanted to pay attention and learn. I mean Norm was from the old school, an old time ironworker. He would bark at you, you know, and call you names but deep down inside, he was a good guy. He wouldn't be afraid to teach you like tying knots or doing this or how to connect iron. You do it this way and you do it that way. Norm, he was a great guy. A lot of guys didn't like Norm but I always thought Norm was a good guy when I worked with him. [What did you call people?] "You dumb punk." Everyone was a punk. When you were an apprentice, you were a punk. You didn't know nothing. "When are you going to wake up and learn something," ya know? You know the cuss words, you'd use them too but... They didn't mean much by it. The old timers called everyone a punk. It was a good learning experience. I enjoyed it. I worked 40 some years. [Any other characters that you can think of?] Syd was a good foreman who told you what needed to be done. He didn't bother you. Some foremen would stand over your shoulder and watch. Most of the guys at Kupfer's were really good foremen. Taught very well. Like Dick Higby and young George Bunders...of course we called him young George. They were good guys. I worked with them a lot. Higby was a good ironworker. He was one of those guys who never got excited or anything but he was a good teacher. That's most of it. The guys I worked with...you know... And then I became a foreman and then it was my turn to work on those apprentices. "God damn it – pay attention!" LAUGHS "How many times do I have to tell you this!" But when you're a foreman, you have the young men...like when I went to work with Badgerland. We had a lot of young kids right out

of school and stuff. They want to get right up there and be the... "I'm going to be the connector. I'm going to be..." "Well, you have to be careful now. Take your time. Don't be doing this now. I don't want anyone getting hurt." I didn't want someone to get hurt on my job and I was very lucky. And that's as far as I can... Great ironworkers, great days. Badgerland was the last company I worked for. That was interesting when all those young kids and stuff, right here in Waunakee.

17:30 [What kind of work was being done in Badgerland?] Badgerland was Badgerland Metal Building. They did a lot of metal buildings. I never did much welding... Well, going back a few years, I worked for Sullivan. Ken F. Sullivan did nothing but metal buildings. Put up the structural and then you sheet it. You did it all. So you learned quite a bit doing a metal building. You were a real tradesman. You started from scratch. Then when you got done, the building looked nice. With Badger Building, sheet metal workers were...ironworkers... I did mostly structural for Badgerland. They did a few metal buildings, but I didn't get involved with that very much. Other than that, you know, like I said. The best job I had was the Kohl Center. Worked for Oscar J. Boldt and got to do the Kohl Center for 15 months. That was interesting. [What kind of work did you do at the Kohl Center?] I did some structural and was in charge of all of the bolts, to make sure the right bolts went into the right holes. Did a little of rod tying when I first started. Then we went into structural. Did the roof and worked on the scoreboard and stuff above. Jack of all trades.

18:52 [Cool. When you started out, what was the gear like and where did you get your gear and so forth.] You mean all the tools and stuff? [Yeah, and the stuff you wore.] You could go down to the hall. As guys retired, they'd bring their equipment to the hall and you could buy it as used. Or you could buy new. Buy your structural belt and your bolt bag and all that. You get your hard hat. Things have changed in 40 years when you have all that safety equipment now that we never had back then. [Did you ever have anything homemade or modified or anything like that?] No, no... You had a hammer but of course it was called a beater. And your pin and your spud wrenches and your crescent wrench and that's what you used for connecting. [What about the hard hats?] Yeah, you had to have a hard hat at all times. They changed. I always wore one with a big wide brim because being a red head, I didn't want to get sunburned and stuff. But hard hats was something that they nagged at you all the time. [Was there anything distinct about the ironworkers hard hats?] No, nothing. A hard hat was a hard hat. A regular old...put it on. [What about the color...or...] No, I don't think the color... I think most ironworkers wore their hard hats backwards. The reason was your welding hood. If you had the bill on it and your welding hood come down, it would hit. You see ironworkers today in most pictures and they have their hard hat backwards. "I'm an ironworker. I have my hard hat on." [Did people ever decorate...? Now you see stickers all over it. In the old days, would people ever do anything with their hard hats?] Oh yeah, you'd always put your union sticker on your hard hat or if you donated something. A lot of people had different colored stickers on their hat. I was never into that. I used to have one for a local #383 because when you went out of the local, you know, and worked for different locals where you have to check in, they wanted to know where you were from.

21:11 [So did you boom out very much?] No, when I worked for Kupfer's, there was some

work out of town, so you had to go. I think I was in Illinois twice so I had to check in twice there. Then out in Milwaukee. Of course, when you're in Milwaukee, that's a different local. That's local #8 and you had to check in. I worked in Milwaukee 2-3 years with Dick Higby and those guys from Kupfer's. I think we worked Northridge and Southridge when I worked for Kupfer's. [Would you stay there for a week or...?] No, we drove back and forth, Dick and I. I think there was four of us and we'd all take turns. Drive back and forth, so it wasn't bad.

21:50 [What about break time and lunches? How did that go over the years when you were working?] Well, you always took your coffee break at 9:30. Went in and had a little sandwich and a cup of coffee. Fifteen minutes time limit and then you went back to work. And then at noon... In the old days they'd go out for lunch. A lot of guys would go out for lunch. A lot of guys would bring their lunch bucket. You sit around and tell stories. They always had pictures on the wall, Playboy pictures on the wall in your job trailers. Now today with the girls on the job, things have changed. I noticed that when I was getting ready to retire. [Was that a good thing?] Well, you know... Eh... If she can do the job, why complain? I worked on a couple of jobs with a couple of young ladies. They could tie rods and kept up with the rest of them. They weren't as strong... They couldn't pick up... The rods come in 8th inch. A #8 rod is an inch. It's 44 foot long. What are you going to expect a woman to pick up? Some of those hard head guys would go, "Hey, do it or get off the job." No, no, no. Use common sense. Like anything else, it was pretty hard to get the women in. I could probably say about my father--he was a lieutenant on the fire department--he'd go nuts if he knew women were in the fire department. My father died...I think he retired in 1962 or 63 from the fire department. He was an old timer. But you know, it's like any business. Women, right away they get excited.

24:00 [Did the tavern play much of a part in the life of an ironworker years ago?] Well, you know... A lot of guys after work had to stop. That's construction. I never did. My wife told me, "If you've got to get drunk to face me, don't come home." I learned that lesson in a hurry. But there were a few guys that had to stop every night and have their beer. Not me. I kind of got educated at a young age. [Some of the young guys kind of piss it away.] Yeah, yeah. There's a lot of guys I know that worked and spent more in the tavern than they should have but that's the way the old timers were. It's like anybody. I bet if you interview people from Gisholt or Oscar Mayer's or any of the old businesses around Madison. It would be the same thing. I know when I was a kid growing up, I used to love to go down to the rail road yard down on West Washington Avenue. Of course it was Tremry's [sp?] and a few other bars down there, that's where the railroad guys hung out. I was just a young kid who enjoyed the trains and stuff. And I remember, geez, these guys get done and they get to go to a tavern. But not me, I guess. I did my days before I got married like anybody else, but after you got married things changed.

25:38 [What about nicknames?] I don't remember too much. I was called Red...Brown was called Brownie. Syd was just Syd. Norm was Norm. There were a few guys who had nicknames... Stub...his name was Robbins and he was called Stub. There are a few... [Tinker.] Tinker, yeah. Freitag, we all called him Arnie. Yeah, there were a few nicknames, a few good ones floating around. I used to go to the union meetings quite a bit and we'd talk there because guys worked for different companies. It was interesting on Friday night to sit and talk to some of those old timers. Guys from up north who never got too social. Most of them guys were called

Jackpine Savages in them old days. But they were good guys too. I worked up in Nekoosa and Wausau area and got to meet those guys. It's a long way for them to come to Madison for a union meeting on a Friday night. So when you got up there to go to work, you used to hear stories about these guys. When you got up there to meet the guys, they weren't bad guys. They were good guys. [Do you remember any of those stories?] Well, I used to hear about those Jackpine Savages are going to do it their way. Come up here and... "You ain't coming up here to change things and doing things this way and that way." I've only been up there a couple different times when work was slack. But I loved the guys. They were great guys. I worked at Nekoosa at the power house. Met a lot of guys up there. Worked in Wausau and met some good guys up there. We used to hear stories, like any place else. You hear stories about guys from other part of the local. They were good men, the were all good ironworkers. [That's what I am – I'm from Rice Lake. I've always known about the Jack Pine Savages.] Yeah, the Jackpine Savage. "Where do you live?" "Oh, I live out in the desert belt, out among the pine trees in a trailer." They love, those guys up north, they love their hunting and fishing. If it was hunting time, they wouldn't come to work. They'd go hunting. That's the way it was. You wouldn't argue with them. [Would guys bring venison sausage or jerky or something to the job?] Well, I was never much into... I never hunted or fished myself and I wasn't into any of that wild turkey or venison. Guys would bring it and want to share it with you and stuff like that. It was just... It's hard to say but, you had a good time. Growing up as an ironworker, I grew up. I did. I was young... Like they say, you are full of piss and vinegar. Right? Them old timers, "what are you trying to do, kill this job?" LAUGHS It was that... They had their pace and that was it. But when I became a foreman, my pace was a little more than the old timers. But I got along good with most of the people. Most guys liked working for me that I know of. I see them today and talk to them...

29:22 [What takes a good pusher?] To be a good foreman? Well, you just got to be... You can't do a lot of hollering. I might have overextended sometimes like everyone else. They all holler. You make a mistake, it could cost a life or something so you got to be very patient with these young kids today. They're not like when I started, with the old timers. They wouldn't tolerate nothing. Today, you'd take the kids off the side and help them the best you can. That wasn't the way it was with those old timers. They had their way. It was like anyone else. [The old timers talk about... What was the background of some of them? Were they farm guys or Germans or Norwegians?] I don't remember. They were just... You showed up to go to work and these old timers...they were just there. I couldn't tell you much about them. They were just... You go to work for so and so and just go there and do your best. And hope that he doesn't holler too loud.

30:50 [Accidents. You said you never fell. Did you have any accidents or...?] I've fallen a small...nothing where I've been really seriously hurt. My friend Dick Higby and I were working together and he slipped off a metal building and crushed his heel. We were out in the middle of nowhere. I loaded him up in my car and took him to the hospital. Left the company truck and everything right on the job. Next day we were back on it. Honestly, I've never seen a guy really get hurt or fall a distance. Maybe...Everett Erstad one time...a piece of iron rolled over and broke his leg. I think that's the extent of seeing a guy really get hurt. But I was never around someone that really fell far, even though you heard stories and stuff. No, I was pretty lucky.

Maybe if I would have seen someone fall and get hurt real serious, I would have thought no, this wasn't for me. It's time to leave. [When you were starting out, did you hear...that an old timer would take you aside during a break, would one of their ways of maybe teaching you by telling you a story about what happened to someone...?] Yeah, they would tell you that you had to be careful. Don't be a hot dog. It happens quick. [Can you remember any of those old stories?] No, not really offhand. I know the one time I fell, I maybe fell 10 feet. It was like, shit – it happened. I'm here! How did I get here so quick? And right away you want to get up. But I hurt my back a little bit and right away they said, "Take it easy, take it easy, why do you want to be a hero and get up?" And I said, "Oh, I'm alright." But I never got seriously hurt. It was just...I cracked a rib and that was it. And I thought, well, I'm pretty lucky. [That is lucky.] You hear stories about guys falling and doing this and that. But I was very lucky. Never was around anyone who really got hurt except I remember Everett getting his leg broke. It was just one of those little things--nothing where a guy fell and got killed. I think Higby and Wes Roscoe and a few other guys were working at the chilled water heating plant at the University when that fellow fell down the chimney and got killed. They were there. I heard about that but I wasn't on the job. But you hear things like that.

33:53 [Can you talk about...say, with a greenhorn ironworker... Did they ever get sent for some tool that didn't exist?] Oh yeah. You play those games. You send people after things that don't exist. It's kind of like when you were kids and you went snipe hunting, right? With a paper bag and you hit them with your finger. Yeah, they send you after things that don't exist. I don't remember too much about that. I remember hearing stories about that. [What would they be?] It would be some crazy thing to get. For a rivet or something crazy that they'd send you after in the tool shed. Some people would just laugh at you. I can't remember, you know... But there were times when they'd send you after stuff and you'd just laugh. You'd learn the next day and you'd think how can I be so silly to believe that?

35:00 [When I went to Pete Stern onto the Findorff site, there was a guy busting iron rods. When he had his back turned, people put some gravel in his bag and any kind of little...pranks? Can you think of anything like that?] Well, you'd always do something like...you know... You might nail a guy's lunch bucket down. When he comes to pick it up, he'd tear the handle off or... Just crazy things. I had a good friend Virgil. He was a good ol' ironworker. We used to call him Melon Head because he had a head on him... He had a five gallon bucket for a hard hat. Yeah, those were fun days. Yeah, they pulled a lot of tricks, especially when you were tying rods. With the wire, they'd wire your pliers to the thing or just do crazy things. It was fun. It was all in the game. But nothing serious where anyone...you know. I can't remember, but there were crazy things that went on.

36:06 [If you are a foreman, what was your attitude toward stuff like that...?] You've got to play a little bit. You can't be serious all the time. I remember at the Kohl Center, a lot of guys played a lot of different silly games. Nothing that would get anyone hurt or at a cost. It was just in fun. But yeah, a guy would be tying rods in a tunnel and you go and tie the top rod so he can't get out. He'd be stuck in there. Guys would say that they were on a job so big they used to have lunch in the bull hall. The bull halls are so big. Just crazy things, but it was fun. Or you weld somebody's tool down. Nothing serious, you wouldn't hurt them or anything. Just tack them to

the iron or something on the guy. It was fun. All those years. [Someone would do that to you or to a person, then you would try to retaliate later on?] Oh yeah, now that we're talking about it, there's one thing I could really tell you about welding. The window on your welding hood is kind of like a little piece of glass. One thing I would do when a guy wasn't looking, I'd cut a piece of paper and stick it in there. He'd strike an arc but he wouldn't see anything. It was just..."What"?!? Then he'd open his welding hood and look around and then he'd figure it out. You stuck a piece of paper in there. If you know anything about welding... My favorite of all time, now that I've been thinking about it... I had a young apprentice one time and a welding rod, if you know anything about welding rod, Jim, you stick it in the holder and when you strike an arc, it sparks. They stuck a sparkler in his things. He struck an arc and it wouldn't go out. He just got mad, threw his stinger down and walked away. He just kept on going. He didn't know. That was one of my all time favorites. Sticking a sparkler in a guy's stinger. He struck an arc and it would just... He would make a face and hold back...and then he finally figured it out. That was one of my all time favorites. [Did you do that when you were a foreman or...] Well, a couple of different times. When I was a foreman, I had a good little apprentice. Joey. Joey Dern. I used to say, "God damn it Joey." But he was a good kid and apprentice. He was willing to learn. He'd make mistakes so I'd holler at him. Yeah. I pulled little pranks on Joey once in a while but he was all right. But that sparkler was my all time favorite. If you know anyone, talk to any of the other ironworkers, they probably done the same thing. Stuck a sparkler in the stinger. [It sounds like a classic...] Yeah, whenever you go back to school, go down to the shop or something. Ask the guy, "Did you ever stick a sparkler in your stinger?" Stuff like that. That was fun. [Would there usually be an audience for something like that?] No, you kind of... You didn't want to embarrass the guy real bad. You know? You might tell another guy, [whispers] "Watch this, watch this..." And the guy would strike an arc...because every time you set your bar joist and stuff you have to weld them down, weld both sides and that. The guy would go to coffee break or something, that's when you would... Just mix a sparkler with a bunch of welding rods. Most guys start welding and just stick it in. It was fun. That was probably the best I've had.

40:06 [Did you have a favorite part of the trade that you especially liked to do?] I used to like to connect. When I first worked with Syd [Dick?] Higby a lot, I did a lot of connecting. I had a good old ironworker...well, he's not old. He's younger than I am. Nick Rochon. He was a hippy and a good guy. Everyone knows Nick. The hippy dippy guy. He was a good guy. I loved to connect with him. A few of those guys were good connectors I worked with. You've probably going to talk... [I've seen pictures of Nick...] Norm Brown and all these guys were all there. [You'll see Nick in this little film...] Yeah, Nick was a good guy. Me and him were going to apprentice school together. We had a lot of fun.

41:05 We used to do crazy things in school too. [Like what?] The guy would be welding in there, just apprentices learning how to weld... The teacher would be teaching. When the guy ain't looking, you'd turn his welder up to 300 or something. You'd just ruin whatever he was doing and he'd have to start all over. But those were... Things we did in school that we shouldn't have done. Things have changed. Things are more... I'm taking like 40 years ago. Things have changed. [When you were a connector, you told me you can't rush things too much but you must also...you want to be fast. Maybe be in competition with other connectors. Could

you talk about that?] Well, you didn't... Most of the time... I always liked connecting because the time would go fast and you'd get a piece all bolted up and by the time the train turned around and come back, you had done another piece and reach up and grab it. It was fun building that, going up and up. It was very interesting. The bigger the piece, the harder it was. I don't care what they say. The bigger the iron, the safety factor keeps going up. You start using your head.

42:35 [How important is the crane operator?] The crane operator is probably 99% of the job connecting. He could kill you in a minute. Say you're up 4 floors and you're working in the blind. The operator can't see you and you're on the telephone or on the walkie-talkie. "Swing to the right easy...swing to the left...boom down...hold the load." The operator is 99% of the safety factor when you're connecting. You're sitting up there on a beam, say 3-4 inches wide. Here comes a beam swinging in and it can't be coming in 100 miles an hour. You've got to be able to reach up and grab it. Once you've got a hold of it, the safety factor was better because you knew where it was. You could guide it and do what you want with it. Slide it into position and get your spud wrench in there. Quick put a bolt on there and put the nut on it. It was a big piece, you put 2-3 on. The operator I always liked... Louie Ziegler was a good operator that worked for Kupfer's for many, many years. Louie lives in Waunakee and is a good friend of mine. A couple of times, things happen, but right away you want to blame the operator. But hey, come on. He's got a helluva job as it is. Picking up a piece, trying to swing it over, get it right where you want it. I would say operator engineers, if you've got a good crane operator, you could make well progress on a job. Setting iron always was one of the things that was taught. This is how we make money: so many pieces a day for the company. You try to get that many pieces as you could. Once in a while, you got one in backwards. Then you got to go back and take it all apart and turn it end for end. You know... Most of your iron has a number on one end or the other. And most guys would mark that iron Red's end or Norm's end. Put an R or an N. So when you're connecting, you knew which piece...so it was in right. [So that was your ground man?] Yeah, the ground man would write north, south, east or west or put your initial on it, which helped. So when an iron come up and you'd grabbed it, and you're a connector, you'd say, "Oh, that's my end." So what you do is give it a spin. Then he'd grab it. That way you got it in. Times happen when you do get 'em in backwards. Then you have to take it apart and you got to change it. It's like a bar joist. Bar joists all have a tag at the end. They tell you 3-4, 35th. All bottom joists had numbers. And according to your blueprint, you'd put them up by this, whichever way they were. The tag...the tag end is marked. And you get one in backwards, then you have to get it back up, turn it. That would cost money, right? And if you owned the company, "What happened here? What took so long?" And you always had a superintendent come out and check on you, which was part of his job. [Would you use hand signals some too?] Oh yeah, yeah. When you're signaling, "boom down" – you'd put your thumb down. Pump your fingers, that means boom down or hold the load or just boom up. Swing right or left. When you're on the telephones it's the same thing. Swing down. Hold it. Boom down easy, a little bit. You'd always be talking. The operator is always working the crane. You hear a lot of stories where operators...things happen. I know when I was on the Executive Board, that young man fell down in Dubuque on the bridge. He was young...I think his name was Woodhouse. A young gentleman that fell off the arch there, down at Dubuque by the bridge. I understand that he fell off of there and landed on the barge. The crane operator just froze, they said, and he couldn't... It was a shock. I wasn't there. Homer [Ingram] was the business agent then and I was on the

Executive Board. We heard them stories.

47:30 [Would you ever ride the load up?] Oh yeah, you'd ride the load a lot of times. But you can't do that no more. Two guys, guy on each end and you'd ride it up and its inside of a column when you get it up there. You can't do that no more. [Tell me what that was like though.] You just sat on it and just hope that the other guy kept his spot. You had a hold of the tie and you worked your way up. It was exciting, sitting there and riding the load. Of course you can't do that any more. Like when you were on a big job, you used to jump on the headache ball and the crane operator would let you down, you know, at lunch and coffee break. Two-three guys would get on and hang on to each other. You can't do that no more. We were in the old days.

48:22 [What about the weather? Whether it was wet, cold or...] Yeah, it was... The old time ironworkers used to tell you, you know, "First drop of rain is God's fault. The second one is yours." You know what I'm saying? [I'm not sure.] You're at work and the first drop of rain hits you, that's God's fault. The second one hits you, and that means get off the job. Do you know what I'm saying? The old timers...it would rain, we'd go and head for the tavern. We'd wait it out but yeah, that was their favorite saying. First one is God's fault and the second one is your own. [Are the beams slippery?] Oh yeah they are very... Like in the winter time I worked at American Family for Kenneth F. Sullivan back then. That big complex of American Family Insurance. We used to have blow torches with a couple of good guys working for me. I was kind of one of the structural foremen working there. I had Don Wigdal who was a good friend of mine who passed away. Jerry Roscoe was an ironworker. He's still around. Jerry would pick out the iron for me and Wiggy would take the blow torch and try to melt the ice and stuff before it went up. But you had to be very careful. Snow, weather... A lot of times they'd shut the job down. Too cold. Too much snow. Too windy. You can't be raising iron three floors and they'd come up spinning like a top. No, no, no. You've got to be very careful. But in the winter, you did your best. No one wanted to go home. When I started, I made \$2.10/hour and I was married. It was tough. But I made a good living and I enjoyed it.

50:32 [Tell me about climbing columns and the art to that.] There was an art to it for guys to do it but I was never very good at it. Norm Lenzer, now that was a guy who could climb iron. You don't do it any longer. You used to shimmy up and tie them, you'd get the foot in the web. You could get up there pretty good. Sit up there, and a piece of iron would come, you could get it. Once you got in, you climbed up and sat on it. Yeah, I remember some guys were really good at shimmying iron, they'd call it "shimmying iron," y'know, they'd get right up there. But me, I wasn't worth a damn. [Is there a term for walking the beam too?] No, not that I... You could "beaver it." That's if you sat down. Put your feet on the bottom and go across. "What are you beavering the iron for? Get up and walk it like a man." "Naw, I'm fine this way. That way I'll go across the bottom." LAUGHS

51:35 But you were talking about fooling around... Now that it came to me. One time we kinda pulled a trick on a guy. He had a bolt bag. We filled both bolt bag with things when he had to shimmy up the column. Probably had 50 pounds of tools on it and he was just an apprentice, you know. "Naw, you don't do that." It's just crazy things. You've got two bolt bags on and they were pretty good size. Then you'd throw different sized bolts... Fill 'em both up for a guy and

he's an apprentice... "There you are. Go to work." Yeah, that was fun. We'd sit and reminisce these old times. It's good... It's too bad we don't have more get-togethers of old time ironworkers. Some companies go out once a month and they have a breakfast. Guys sit around and get to reminisce old times. It's never happened. Old ironworkers, I don't know why it is. It just seems like things have changed. We don't play around any more.

52:40 [What about when OSHA came in. Could you tell about before...] I hated OSHA. Them guys...they didn't use common sense. They just...come in. That fining crap all the time. You're better off just to leave the job if you know they're coming. You could save the company money. I mean, they are there for a reason but it's pretty hard to tell an old timer how to change his way. It took a lot of adjustment, even for me, for OSHA's rules and regulations. Being tied off. That's the way it had to be. OSHA was OSHA. It's the government and you can't argue with them. [I think every once in a while people do ignore some of the things.] You could get by but don't get caught. There's a difference. You can do certain things. It's like driving your car. You're supposed to wear seat belts. How many times do you put it on? Sooner or later, you're going to get caught.

53:55 [How about your involvement with the local.] I was a trustee for a few years. A trustee looks over the bills to make sure of things. Then I got on the Executive Board with Homer and those guys and I was on that for a few years. It was kind of nice, though it took a lot of time and stuff. You went there and tried to keep everyone happy. Negotiated contracts a couple of times. Tried to get a raise. Do this and do that. Try to keep the local solvent and keep everyone happy. You're there and guys would come and complain about this and that. So you had to make sure everyone was happy, one big happy family. Yeah, I enjoyed being on the Board with the old time ironworkers, the old timers and young guys. [What were the meetings like when you first started out?] Well, when I was a trustee, we would just go...a couple...another guy would just go through the bills, make sure there's nothing there that ain't supposed to be. Try to keep the locals solvent basically. Then you got on the Executive Board and you had a meeting before and you kind of discuss this and that. Then you had the Board meeting and the union guys were there. The Executive Board was actually mostly there for negotiating the contract. You wanted to have good guys on the board, try to get you that dollar raise or that dollar fifty raise. Try to sit down with the contractors and be fair. You can't... I always thought, when I was a young guy, you can't go in there and tell the contractor, "Well, Jesus Christ. We need a \$5/hour raise." Well, you know... Think about it. \$5/hour. And there were times when we would negotiate and we'd come back to the body and they were never happy. The body was never happy with what you came back. You had to sit down, there were five of us. You had all the contractors and they are negotiating with all the trades, not just the ironworkers. You can't give one trade a \$2/hour raise and then another trade a .50/hour raise. The carpenters, ironworkers, electricians, plumbers, you had to stay... I always thought that the contractors knew exactly what they were going to give you, even when we went on strike a few times. We went on strike and came back and got what they wanted to give us. They were going to give you a dollar and that was it. You could sit and argue with them for days... You'd want a dollar an hour raise for the next three years when you're signing a three year contract. Or a \$1.25, \$1.50... But I always thought the contracts knew exactly what they were going to give you before you sat down at the table. That was kind of the hard part of being on the negotiating committee. The body was never happy. I don't

care... You could settle for \$5 and come back and someone would say, "Why didn't we get \$6?" Yeah know? [What about when pensions came in and guys had to pay into their...] Oh yeah, we started paying into the pension. I was one of them guys that kind of thought at first... "Why in the hell do I need someone to take care of my money?" You know? But as you think about it, and sat with other people, if it wasn't for that pension plan we have now, there would be a lot of guys in big trouble. I mean...it's a good pension plan. It pays ironworkers a pretty good pension and that. Old timers, "No--no, no!" They didn't want nobody touching their money. I was kind of in that group a little bit. Not 100% , but why did I have to pay someone to take my money. But now when you think about it, it's not such a bad deal. When I retired, I had my money in the SMA. You know about our pension, being an ironworker. Doing what you're doing. You have your pension. You have your SMA. You can either merge it or take it out separately. I took my pension, of course... I have cancer so I took 50-50 so my wife, if something happened, she'd get a nice settlement. But I took my SMA and went to a financial advisor. I've done pretty well with it. The money I got, I got some \$100,000 or whatever it was. Went to a financial advisor and advised me... I didn't want to be a millionaire, but I didn't want to loose my money. I need this and he knew what my pension was. Yeah, it was very hard to get them old timers, including myself, to believe in the pension. I'm not one of those guys that's going to deny it. I've said it and they know that I've said it. "We don't need people taking care of our money." Now that you think about it, it was a good deal. So you can call me an old timer. LAUGHS

1:00:10 [I wanted to ask about the relationship between ironworkers and other trades...] "Well, those God damn scabby carpenters. They're terrible." I'll be honest with you. That's the feeling we all got. Them damn scabby carpenters and laborers all want to do our work. That was a lot that was going on back in those days. They used to say, everyone hated carpenters. Everyone used to try to steal everyone's work. That wasn't a good part about it. You still hear that today on the job. It's too bad the trades can't get along. I think if the trades got along, they'd be a lot better, work wise and getting things done. But other than that, we still have that hard feeling between the guys. [Did you have any run-ins with the carpenters?] Oh yeah. When we were on strike, the carpenters were doing our work and stuff. We'd have to put a picket up and everyone hated us in those days. I remember when they were doing the campus square if you remember when they were going around. Joe Daniels was doing the work up there. We did a lot of protesting up there. [This spring you mean?] No, this was years and years ago when we were... Oh, I don't remember. When they first started doing the fountains and stuff up town and all that work was going on. They still have that problem. You know... I still go and visit my friends at Badgerland and Sullivan. Marty Ballweg, I stop to see Marty whenever I can. He's with Ideal now. You still have that carpenters and laborers, especially on road construction. The laborers are doing a lot of tying rods and stuff like that. You still have that problem. [Laying down concrete?] Yeah, like laying the rebar out there. If you ever get out on a bridge deck, the rods go two different ways. They are dipped in that paint, in that epoxy paint. Their paint is mostly green now. Yeah, that's... You bring that up about... Yeah, the trades, they all hate each other. They really don't hate each other but, you know, carpenters... Everyone hated carpenters. Every ironworker... [I have some guys I know out in Mount Horeb. Some are laborers, some are sheet metalworkers but a couple carpenters...and they say... "Jim, you're working with ironworkers? Aren't you going to interview anyone skilled?] Yeah, skilled all right! Some of them carpenters, all they can do is put up forms. They're not...trade carpenters? Go ask them to go build a cabin

or something like that. There are some very good carpenters. But talking about crazy things: some of the crazy things that went on at the Kohl Center. Oscar J. Boldt. There was carpenters and laborers and ironworkers, always pulling funny things. The Kohl Center, you had a carpenter in the basement, a carpenter on first floor, a carpenter on second floor building the sky boxes and stuff. Every carpenter had their own gang box, full of his own tools. The best thing about doing that was take tools out of one tool box and put them in another, from floor to floor. I used to have a good friend who was a foreman there and he'd--blueprints were like 2-300 pages--he'd be working on something and when he wasn't looking, I'd turn the page, 3-4 pages. He'd come back in and start looking at one of them. "I'm on the wrong page." [Laughs.] Or take a piece of black tape and put it over the end of the transit [i.e. transit compass]. [Laughs.] Now that we think about it, some of those crazy things that went on, it was fun. Other than that, you know, I really enjoyed the trade. I loved what I did or I wouldn't have stayed as long as I did. I met a lot of great people. Sometimes I miss it. I'm 70 years old and I know I can't do it no more. It was fun. The best I can tell you, it was fun.

[I think this is a really good interview. We did an hour and 5 minutes.]

It was fun, yeah, it was fun.