

Ironworkers Documentation Project

**AUDIO LOG FORM**

Interviewer's recording no(s): JPL IW Audio 12

**Contact:** David Olby

**Interviewer:** Jim Leary

**Interview:**

Date: Saturday, October 29, 2011

Place: Kitchen in Olby home

Other people present: Olby's wife, Rita

Background noise: refrigerator motor, dog barking—both 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:**

It is October 29, 2011 and we're at the home of David and Rita Olby on County Road C right where it intersects with County Road E in southern Ashland County, just a little bit east of Highway 63. David is going to talk about his experiences as an ironworker and also about his Dad who was also an ironworker and also the composer and performer of the great song, "The Ironworker Blues"

**Audio Interview Contents**

David Olby Interview

Counter

No./Time

Topic

0:01 Testing equipment. Announcement, initial question—when and where born, how you got into ironworkers trade?

1:08 Well, I was born in 1949 and actually I was born in a Model-T on White River Hill. Never

made it to the hospital but... Born at a very young age [chuckles]. Well, I grew up south of Sanborn, on a little farm. And we farmed for quite a few years. Milking thirteen cows at the most, by hand, my younger sister and my older brother and I. And at that time Dad was gone all week, and then he'd come home on the weekends. He was gone on different ironworking jobs. And so we'd have a list of chores to do throughout the week. And when he come home on the weekend things had better be pretty well done. And back then you did what your parents told you. And if you didn't there was—we had a lot of willow growing up around the place. So we'd get to choose whichever stick we wanted. Luckily that didn't happen very often, but whenever it did we deserved it. So we did that. We did the farming for a number of years, through our teen years. Kept us off the street, kept us busy. And I think that was dad's main goal. For the most part it was a good life, and we grew up that way, raising our own meat, and started deer hunting when we were 12. And Dad wouldn't buy us a new rifle, he bought us used ones so they were broke in and knew that they were good quality. So we, my brother and I, started in with 30/30 Winchesters. And I'm probably missing a lot of things in-between here, but time is short.

3:28 So we did that and our first hunting experience was being dropped off at the edge of the woods, and picked up in the evening. We could go hunt and do whatever we wanted to do. We did have training, home training, before we were dropped off. And Dad always told us that during the winter when we have nothing to do to take our rifles down and snap in with them. Make sure they were empty, and on safe and everything...and just snap in with them and...get used to them. Probably one of the biggest bucks I ever got in my life was on account of that training. This is after I had been in the Marine Corps and went through all of their training. I had this nice buck standing in front of me and we were taught in the Marine Corps, BRASS... Breath, relax, aim, sites, squeeze. And I did all of that. Squeezed off the shot. The buck stood there. And in my mind, I'm just going crazy, trying to figure out what I did wrong. And I knew I had to make a quick decision so I just upped and snapped and shot and down he went. And...so that was...Dad's training.

4:55 [Gets choked up thinking about his dad. Leary talks a little about his late father: [I thought a lot about my Dad on the way up here. He died two years ago. Every day I think about him...than something happens and it reminds me of something he told me. I was cleaning the storm windows yesterday with my brother. We were putting them on the old home place. The old man would have... He would have been out there cracking the whip on us. LAUGHS]

5:39 So that was probably one of the best experiences I had. In that year, Dad had been fighting cancer for two years and that was the last...that was the last...time he hunted with us. We started dragging the buck out of the woods. We had about a mile and a half to drag it. And it was a real dry, crisp year and no snow on the ground. And Dad had walked into his favorite pine tree and that was about as far as he could get. And he was sitting there when we came dragging that buck out. [Wow.] And...I had a grin on my face probably like a jack o'lantern. Buttons already to pop off my shirt and Dad says, "It's a keeper." LAUGHS So we had to kind of laugh because when we got the deer out to the car, and went to load it up, one side was bare. It didn't have any hair left on it I guess because the ground was so dry. LAUGHS I'm going to jump

ahead a little bit here on this story. Thirty years later, my daughter married a taxidermist and I was telling them the whole story about this particular deer. And he asked me all about which way it was facing and what his face looked like and if it had a lot of grey on it. And whereabouts the grey was and things like that. And...I thought he was being just curious. Well, thirty years later, for Christmas, I get a shoulder mount...of that deer. [David gets a little choked up.] I don't know how you would say it but that brought that dead deer back to life. [Wow.] Even though it was still dead. But more than that, it about the memory back to life. He did such a good job on it and, right to this day, we have it hanging in the living room with a guarantee that...he would fix it if anything was wrong with it. So it don't get any better than that. [Very cool.]

9:04 So that's just a little bit about growing up. In my senior year, well, all through this--the whole time--Dad is doing his, he always was a great lover of country music and Dad always said, "There's--my two favorite kinds of music are country, and western." LAUGHS And that was always interwoven throughout our childhoods and it was quite a bond. And in the earlier years, Mom and Dad made sure we got to Sunday school. And we always had a neighbor, Augie Moss, who would come down and have coffee with Mom and Dad on Sunday mornings. And his mother was very old at that time and he would take her to church. Then he would come down and gab with Mom and Dad. And that was pretty regular. That was like every Sunday. So we had a pretty good Christian upbringing. And I think later on, having that woven into our family held us together when things started to go, health-wise, started to go upside down. That was a very valuable part of our bringing up too.

10:50 In my senior year in high school, I asked Dad if I could--at Christmas break--if I could go with him on one of his jobs. And he said. "Sure." So I had two weeks of hanging with the guys. And my brother already was working for Dad. And I think the job I went with on Dad, the first one was, I never even got to the job site. I ended up being the chief cook and bottle washer while he was at work. So that was kind of a letdown, but I got to be by the guys anyway so that was ok. But then in the spring, when school was done, then I went on the first job with him. And it was kind of a crude awakening. We're standing, looking at this framework, this red iron and Dad says, "Are you going to be a ground man or are you going to be an ironworker?" And I said, "Well, I'll be an ironworker." He says, "Well, get up there." I looked around for a ladder and there was no ladder. And I said, "Well, how am I gonna get up there?" And he showed me one time how to grab the column and walk up the column until you get to the, to the purlins and climb up there and walk the web up on the bent and upper beam. And that's what I did. And I was amazed that I could do that. And from that point on, we just got better at working together, my brother and I. Not too bad for a couple of guys who fought like cats and dogs when we were farming but we learned to rely on each other because...

13:06 My brother Larry and I, we could walk right on top of the steel and carry the next, carry the next purlin up and lay it in place. And in order to do that, you had to have a good teammate. 'Cause if one of you slipped, you had to know exactly what to do so you wouldn't drag each

other into the hole or take a fall. I think back on it now and we did have a few close calls. I think everybody does. You do things that get you in trouble without even realizing you're heading that way. I was up on top of a scaffolding, this was in White Pine, Michigan. We were working on the wheelhouse for the big bucket that went down the mine shaft. And they would fill it and bring it to the surface. So we were working on the wheelhouse which had a 60 foot eave height. And I climbed up off of the scaffolding onto the roof. We had the sheet steel on already. And it was early in the morning and I was walking kind of at a diagonal over to the ridge into the gable end at the same time, kind of side-stepping. And I stepped off of the dry part of the roof and got into the morning moisture and frost. And before I realized it, I'm sliding backwards. So I laid down flat and grabbed the ribs on the steel with both of my hands and was trying to get a foot stuck on the screw heads, just off the sliding end. Ever so slowly, I just kept sliding--and I got down to the edge of the eave and the lower part of my legs were hanging over already. And I looked over my shoulder and all I could see down below was frozen ground and I figured, either I'm dead or broke up really bad. And about the time I come to that conclusion, this big ol' arm reaches up [David gets choked up a little], reached across off of the scaffolding and that was on the gable end. And he yanked me over there. And--before I could even take a breath, I got my butt chewed big time. And that was Dad. And he said, "What were you thinking?" And I says, "Dad, I guess I wasn't." So he just let it go at that. And...

16:29 One other time we were working on an airplane hangar which wasn't very high. Just the way things happen, you've got to be thinking all the time, every minute of the day because you're working high in the air and--stupid mistakes get people killed. We were laying the sheet steel and, as we were doing that, we would lay the insulation and staple it together and then lay the next sheet steel on top of that. And so on and so forth. And, ahead of the insulation, we always had a plank that you could walk on while you were stapling the insulation together. And at that time--I think I was chewing tobacco, or had a cold, I don't remember which one. But I just took a spit over my right shoulder and thought nothing of it. Got up to move and I stepped from the sheet steel onto the plank and that's where the spit had landed. And it had froze. My foot hit that and both feet went out from under me, but luckily I straddled the plank. Dad and the owner of the hangar were walking below--good timing--right at the same time. And Dad hollered, "Headache." That's usually what they holler when somebody drops something from up above. Well, here it was me, I was dropping. But luckily, like I said, I straddled the plank and Dad hollered "Headache!" And I said, "BS." And I said, "Butt ache." LAUGHTER He looked up at me and just shook his head. But that was was lucky. If, you know, if I wouldn't have straddled the plank, I would have been on the concrete. And that was probably the two scariest things that ever happened to me working on the steel. And sometimes I wonder why the good Lord was picking on me, but I think he was trying to train me. LAUGHS [So where was that, with the hangar, where you were working there?] I think that was in Marquette.

19:03 We were worked Marquette, Ishpeming, Peshtigo. No, I take it back. It was Peshtigo because we were crisscrossing the Wisconsin border in that little tip. Yeah, it was Peshtigo. But

the other one, like I said, was at White Pine. We worked out of Ontonagon. We stayed in Bergland, Michigan, when we were working White Pine. But in a year's time, as far as I can remember, we probably had six different jobs. We subcontracted out of Iron Mountain through W.B. Thompson Company. And we built a electrical--I forget the name of it now but it was a building. In fact, I've seen a truck with that name on it, here, not too long ago. So that electric company is still in business in Iron Mountain. I'm just, I'm not bringing up the name right now but--that was one of the buildings we did. [This is likely M.J. Electric, headquartered in Iron Mountain, Michigan.]

20:26 We had some crazy guys working with us—it was just amazing. A lot of the boys were right from this area that we knew, or knew their families. And that worked out real well. We made a good team. Everybody was looking out for each other all the time. I worked for, maybe a year and a half, I don't remember exactly now, but I remember thinking, you know--they always say if you decide what you're going to do for the rest of your life, look at the fruit on the tree before you decide to go that way. And I remember thinking--when my hands were numb and I couldn't pick up a screw, couldn't pick up a drill; a lot of work you had to do without gloves on because you couldn't, like screwing the sheeting down, you couldn't hardly hold the screws with gloves on--I remember being that cold and, at the age of 18, between 18 and 19, having hemorrhoids from sitting on the steel. And I'm thinking, this is the fruit on the tree. And I more or less right then decided I'm going in some other direction. LAUGHS And there's ironworkers that have been doing this all of their lives, so I kind of wimped out. From that point on, I did the next best thing in my life. I joined the Marine Corps. LAUGHS Another rude awakening.

22:20 [You said you worked with some crazy guys...guys around here. Can you tell about some of them?] Well, one of them was Happy Hudak. And his family hailed right from Ashland. And--hmm...just a fun guy to be around. And he was a short, little, dark haired guy and he could climb steel like he was born to do it. And a good guy to get along with. Very reliable. And another fellow was Dave Tapani. And I know my dad and his dad worked together for a lot of years. And that's the thing, once you're in that venue, you run on to people repeatedly depending on where the job is and who was hired for. But you'd run into your old friends repeatedly. And I seen that trend going on there. Well, and Dave's dad was Rudy and they lived over on Highway 13 about five miles south of Ashland. Another one was Jack Hudak, er, Jack Shubat. Now these are the guys who were on the crew in that year, year and a half that I worked there. He lived just up--south of Ashland on 112. Still lives out here. And all of these guys were probably 5-8 years older than me at that time so they're pretty old now. Some of them started young. [Would you spell that?] Shubat. [Spelling confirmed through White Pages for Jack J. Shubat.] I don't know. All I remember at that time was he had a great sense of humor and--the guys were always trying to get me lined up with girls. I was just 18, between 18 and 19 then and wasn't much interested. But they were, I do remember one thing though—we, at night we liked to go out and have a few brewskies. And after working hard all day, a lot of times out

in the cold, two brewskies and I'd be gone. That would be enough for me as soon as that warm air hit me, especially after eating supper. And, you know, a lot of times we'd go out and eat steak. We ate real well. We had to because you burned it up the next day. I remember one time we went from--we were staying in Bergland, working at White Pine--and we drove back to Wakefield because we heard there was a wedding dance going on. Still don't know whose it was. But we crashed it, got three sheets to the wind. We're on the way back to Bergland and we were riding in Happy Hudak's--it was a Ford that had the electronic trunk and the electronic convertible and pure white, just a beautiful car--and we got about half way back and got a flat tire. Well, it's darker than the inside of a cat outside and everybody's pretty gassed up. So we slept there until daybreak and got up woke up, and got the trunk open, and got the tire changed. We got back to Bergland for breakfast. And we walked into the little restaurant that we went to every morning. Dad was already finished eating and--we had just pounding headaches—and Dad got up and he said, “Anybody isn't on the roof when the whistle blows can head 'er down the road.” And he looks at my brother Larry and I and says, “Boys, you'll be the first ones to go.” And we skipped breakfast that morning. We were on the roof when the whistle blew. And talk about a long day. It wasn't worth the party. LAUGHTER That was one of Dad's sayings too, that “If you can't do it, you can't stay.”

27:47 And I did see him have to fire a couple of guys and it wasn't, it wasn't a nice thing to see but they just couldn't hack it. Hmm. One feller was given--well, he was new on the job--and he was given the simple job of cutting out gusset plates with a propane torch, or acetylene torch rather. And he was doing that next to the work shack and, Dad came back from the job site, and here the guy had the acetylene torch set wrong so it was smoking black. And he was kinda cutting half way through it and he was trying to beat the, the gusset plates with the back of the torch. And there were flames coming out of the torch all over the place. Gosh! Dad give him a warning, “You know, there's a \$300 torch head shot.” The next job he gave him was going over to the job site with a wire brush and a spud wrench that would fit the anchor bolts. And the job was to take away the brush and clean the cement residue out of the threads out of the anchor bolts. And run the nuts on and run them back off to make sure that they were ready to go, so that when the red iron got there, we were ready to stand it up, that there was no hold up with a crane sitting there. And we went to set the first, the first bent, which is the column on each side and... then a joist, two joist which make a bent, and two bents to a bay. So we're setting up the first bent and we couldn't get the lug nut, we couldn't get the anchor bolts on. Well, it actually--one anchor bolt was twisted off and one the nut wouldn't go on, so we had to quick brush that and get it anchored down. Well, that fella there got his walking papers because what he was doing was just running the nut on and taking that wrench and putting the pipe on it and trying to run the anchor bolts down and it was twisting them off. And it just caused a, it cost a lot of dollars to have that crane sitting there. Not only that, it was dangerous for the guys working it too. Everything was kind of in turmoil. So, yeah, he got his walking papers and--it ain't a good thing to see. You can't keep somebody on that can't listen, because down the line somebody will get hurt or get killed.

31:10 [When you mentioned red iron... What does that mean?] That's your structural steel. That's just the framework. I'm forgetting my nomenclature on the stuff, but two columns and two joists make one frame. And that's called a bent. Two of those make a bay. So if you've got four bays in a building, you're going to have--eight or nine bents? Two, four, six, eight... [But the term red iron just refers to a girder or the length of....] Any of your frame steel, which would be a girder, which would be purlin, any of that stuff that ties all the frame together. It's all painted with Rust-Oleum paint, which is mostly reddish brown.

32:23 [So when you were picking up the trade, was there any apprenticeship or you just sort of jumped in there?] Yeah [LAUGHS] you just jumped in. It was definitely on-the-job training and baptism by fire mostly. [Did you have a card then? Did you work out of a local?] I had a tinnerman's card [i.e. a member of the Sheet Metal Worker's International Association, a.k.a. "tinman" or "tin basher"]. I couldn't get a ironworkers card until I did an apprenticeship. But they could get me in under a sheet metal men's permit--and that's how I got started, which is kinda crazy but it got me in there. We had--well, let's see--from there we went, we went to the Marine Corps. Dad had asked me why I wanted to join the Marine Corps, and I was speaking out of no knowledge. I was speaking just from my heart. And at that time the Vietnam War was in full bloom. And I never gave it that much thought. There was so much controversy and bad information coming back to the United States--if any information or lack of. And Dad said, "Why the Marine Corps?" And I said, "Well, Dad, if I'm going to go into any service, I'm going into the best." Not realizing that the best also puts you right in the front. I guess I didn't think that far ahead. He says, "Yeah but why, why do you even want to do this?" And I said, "Dad"--and this was on a road trip coming back home. And I knew, I knew he wanted my brother and I to be ironworkers. And carry on the family--I don't know if it even a tradition--but carry on what he had taught us. And--I had made up my mind then--I'm not spending the rest of my life doing the steel construction, but I was very proud of, to have been involved in it and be able to do it. That was kind of a--you know, you're up in the air and looking down at little people walking down below and--it gives you a sense of pride that you can do that kind of thing and be part of a good team and have them, have your team members, trust you. That was the other good thing about that. But as far as going into the Marine Corps, I told Dad, "Dad, I've had a good life and it's time to just pay back some." And being a country guy, he could understand that. Dad was always very patriotic.

36:17 [Let's talk about your Dad a little bit. Do you know where your ancestors came from or how they got here to Northern Wisconsin? Could we even start further back?] Well, my Grandfather, Odin, lived at White River Hill. Even farther back than that, his Dad was Gottfried and they came from Norway, of course. They were Norwegian. And I didn't know much about Great Grandpa, but Granddad Odin lived on White River Hill on Highway 112. Had a little, he was a Pentecostal minister and he had a congregation with a lot of local people. Some of the names that pop into my head were Hegstroms and Andersons and-- Rita, can you remember any more? [Asks his wife. She say, "What was that"?] The people involved in White River

Church? Well, there was a lot of them anyways throughout the years. And that was my very early childhood. I can remember that. I went to one service that sticks out in my mind in that little white church. We had a Black minister that particular Sunday. And the stage in that church was, like, one step up was just a six inch rise and then it had the old piano on it, and the pulpit. This Black minister had everybody just praising the Lord and actually it was kinda scary. A lot of folks crying and weeping and--they were making noise. They were making noise unto the Lord. But being just a little kid, it was kind of neat at the same time but it was kinda scary too. I thought to myself. Some of these people are really suffering here. And that's about all I can remember about that. But we still have the paperwork and stuff from the church and--the Church is long gone now. I did salvage some of the ceiling tile and wall tile and some of the things out of it to do my addition here on the place.

40:02 That one time, Rita and I had it in our minds to make the church property a family reunion place. And by that time, the church was already sinking into the ground. The wooden floor was rotted away but it could still be salvaged but it would take some money and some time. Well, back in our early years of marriage, we didn't have any money. We had kids. We had diapers. No money. And so my sister Jody sent letters to all of our relatives and we sent out about 40 letters and got not one response back. So that kind of squashed that whole idea. So eventually, the old church went, got sold to a guy for the cost of the taxes and the property was such a small piece of property that you couldn't build on it. The guy that bought it was burning brush one day and it burned the church down. LAUGHS And that ended the church.

41:27 Then getting back to our heritage, then my mom's folks hailed from down around Greenwood and Thorpe, Wisconsin. Grandpa was a horse trader, horse farmer. And a big burly barrel-chested guy. Had a great big bushy eyebrows and I always thought that was pretty cool until I grew 'em. LAUGHS And Grandma was a stout farm lady. Had a big, she had a big ol' bulge on her right arm, on the backside of her bicep where she had been bitten by a horse. Back in the day, you got whatever treatment there was and apparently there wasn't much. And it just grew into a big lump on her arm but I remember that about her. And she was ambidextrous. LAUGHS If you were being bad, she could really smack you with either hand just as well. LAUGHS And a lot of times she would, she would feint with a right and give you a left, but she was a kind hearted person. But stern. And Grandpa was stern. Both had very good senses of humor. [What were their names?] Grandpa's name was Fred, Francis, and Grandma was Charlotte. Years later--well they lived in a house that had no electricity and I can still smell the kerosene lamps, and the wood stove--and we were there in the wintertime, getting close to Christmas, I remember looking in their windowsill and I thought it was so cool. I was probably...maybe 6 or 7 at that time. They had these little Christmas tree ornaments in the window that were kind of like a fuller brush texture to 'em with little dots of glue at the ends of the branches and they looked so real to me that I thought that was really neat. And I heard from out in the kitchen, "Don't touch those." So they were still neat but had to look at them from a distance. LAUGHS I think a year or so later, my folks decided that Grandma and Gramps had



to let the farm go. They were totally destitute and the house had, other than wood heat, had no heat. So they came to live with us. And that was great. That was great having them there. And we just moved over and made room for 'em. It was good having 'em in our house. And then a couple of years later, one of my aunts from Oregon decided they needed a warmer climate so they moved them to Oregon after much turmoil and sadness. Well, that's where they ended up dying, was out there. So eleven years later, my brother and I talked my folks into giving us airfare to go out there. And eleven years later, we went to visit Grandpa. Grandma had already passed on. Grandpa was in a nursing home in Medford, Oregon. So my brother and I ended up out there, found the nursing home. We stayed with the same aunt and uncle that took them out there. And we went to see Grandpa and here we are, 17-18 years old and Grandpa recognizes us as soon as we walk in. While he was in the nursing home, he had cancer on one leg and they amputated that. But we got to have lunch with him and had a great visit. And my brother came back home and, well, . . .

46:35 We knocked around Oregon for a little while and we were running short on money so I got a job working for Edward Hines Lumber Company. And earned enough money to ship Larry back home, my older brother, and I stayed on until almost Christmastime. And that was a good experience, working in that huge lumbar company. And like our lumber companies around here, they'll have a big log out in the front with their name on it or some logo on it or something. And I thought ours were pretty big logs. They were like four foot through the middle. But the one they had in front of Edward Hines Lumber Company, it was more like 16 feet through the middle. I stood on the end of it and held my hand as high as I could with my fingers touching the heart of the log. That's--it was just tremendous. And see these big logs come and start spinning on the lathe. They would spin and throw cold air throughout the whole building, they would fan so much. And it was tremendous just watching that happening. I don't know how many thousands of feet they would get off of one log but it was a lot. And I remember one time--I got along with the foreman pretty well. I was doing all of the back breaking scrub work that nobody else would do, which was ok. I was used to that. He put me in one room where all of the conveyor belts converged and it was, it was like 6 feet deep with saw dust. And it smelled like a calf pen. I mean it was, it had been in there for a long time. And he sent me in there to clean it up. I looked at it and I thought, "This ain't so bad." There were conveyors running every which way. All you gotta do is put it on a conveyor and it's gone. It's not like you have to load it and haul it and take it someplace. By the end of my shift that night, I was sweeping the floor in there. And the foreman came in and just shook his head. And he said, "I have put I don't know how many guys in this room and you are the first one that ever stayed and did it. All the rest of 'em said 'I'm outa here.' That's amazing." He said, "Where do you want to be placed?" And I said, "I want to work on the green chain." And up until that point, I had cleaned under the green chain, pulling all the bark and slabs and everything that falls underneath it--which was a mean job because it was too low to stand up under and it was too high to, it was just high enough that everything you did was on your hands and knees were just kind of half bent so it was hard on the back. But I got that done. Well, he put me on the green chain. And at that

time, I was chewing tobacco. Well, on the green chain, you're pulling veneer and you'll have sometimes one size that you pull on each side, like a 36 inch piece or a, sometimes two sizes. You'll have 18 on one side and a 36 on the other side. And you'd have a cart on each side of you and that's your job, is to pull your size veneer when it comes down the conveyor. That was gravy work as far as I was concerned. I loved it. But I had one bad thing. I was chewing tobacco and I never, never could swallow tobacco and I would salivate so bad. And--but working on a green chain, you can spit wherever you want to. Well, I was spitting on veneer as it went by. And the foreman came over to me one night and he says, "You know, that knoter is really, really punching out more knots than it should be. This stuff doesn't have that many knots. You're going to have to quit spitting on that veneer." LAUGHTER And what it would do it would chop out every place I spit and put a plug in there. Well then it would downgrade the quality of the veneer. And so I had to quit chewing tobacco. So that was the end of my tobacco habit. LAUGHS [In other words the punch on the knoter was hooked to a photosensitive device that mistook the dark tobacco stain for a knot in the wood.]

51:15 [Can up tell...hmm...when you moved here and your Dad... Could you tell when and where he was born and how he got into the trade or what you know about him as an ironworker?] Dad was born on White River Hill again in 1925. And Grandpa had a little farm going there, too, so he could kinda see the trend. And Grandpa also built his own or made his own cement blocks and built his dairy barn. Probably one of the first ones in the area that actually had a cement foundation. By the time I was old enough to recollect anything, that barn was long gone so I never did get to see it. But I did get to see Grandpa making cement blocks and that carried on into Dad making cement blocks too. And the place we're on right now, still has a few of the blocks around here. Actually the addition on the back of the garage is cement blocks. The whole garage is cinder blocks but the, the addition in the back is cement blocks and that's some of the ones that Dad and Grandpa had made. And Dad bought this place. Well, to get back to... After Dad became old enough to get out on his own, he hitchhiked out to the West Coast and went to work as a welder in the ship yards. And jumping way ahead, that ultimately led to Dad's death with asbestos poisoning. All those years, he carried asbestos in his body and eventually it caused cancer and took him out of the picture. After he came back from the ship yard work out there . . .

54:02 Another name popped into my head too. Willy Butler was another guy that did Dad did steel with. Ross Watson was another one, but that was some of the older guys that--I worked with Ross one time at one of the jobs. But those two fellas, Dad worked American Bridge with and they worked the grain elevators up in Superior. Now Ross was on a job, I don't remember if it was in Michigan, but I wasn't in the construction then, but he was injured on the job. A crane operator had, through miscommunication on the walkies or radios or whatever they used then, he had two-blocked his pulley on the crane and snapped it. And it came down and clubbed Ross in the shoulder, broke his shoulder. And a little bit over it would have just smashed him, but

anyway it was kind of a glancing blow but it broke his shoulder. [The block came down? That's what came down?] The pulley came down. [The pulley...yeah.] The pulley. Yup. And that--eventually when Ross was on the mending stage, he ended up getting cancer--and that took him out of the picture. But I do remember Dad going and sitting with him and, you know, just being by him. That's all you can do when somebody is dying with cancer. That's all you can do is be with them. Even if you don't say anything, just be there. And that's probably one of the hardest things there is to do. [I did it with my Mom for a long time.] Yeah. You can't talk about the future because there isn't any. You can talk about the past but it's bittersweet. So you just sit there. Cribbage comes in real handy. LAUGHS

56:48 Well, Dad worked in the American Bridge Union for a number of years. Now this was before. This was before us kids were old enough to really know too much about that. And, you know, he'd tell us about it in retrospect, but climbing very, very high steel and doing that, you know? But I think that was, if not the way he got started in steelwork, it was part of it. It just moved on to doing his own, doing his own business. I remember Dad hiring a tax man, L. Peterson, to help him figure out his taxes when he started our own company, the Olby Erection Company. When Dad came home on the weekends from one of the job sites, he would spend the whole weekend in the little office out here doing taxes, figuring out how to do taxes. And I think that was harder on him than, than actually doing the work or being the boss. Figuring out the taxes and coming out at the end of the year. And I know just from what I seen at this place that we didn't get rich doing that.

58:26 [When he worked in the ship yards, do you know where that was?] It was in California some place. [I know they had them in San Francisco, ship yards.] I never knew much about that. He never talked about any of it. [I have an old friend who started in the ship yards in San Francisco in the late 30s and he lived with asbestos.] Yeah, it was a common thing. All the pipes are wrapped with it. And now if they find one pipe with it, they call in the clean up team and, you know. They'll have special suits and special masks and probably air tanks on them and everything else. And find one ceiling tile in a high school or something that has it. LAUGHS

59:18 [What can you tell me about this song here, "Ironworker Blues"?] Well, you know--and after you and I talked a number of times, I got looking in our closet. There's a book. Dad had written more songs than I even knew. Unfortunately, they don't have any music with them but there's like 20 some songs in there that. This particular one I got to be part of, whether I wanted to or not. That's the way we did things. LAUGHS Back to the old, "If you can't do it you can't stay." LAUGHS So Dad had a little band here, well, over the years, he probably had two or three different ones as people would join and then as life went on, something would take them away. But it was amazing how many people would come out of the closet that were talented that played different instruments or had great voices and just giving them an opportunity to be part of this. They would just show up. I remember one guy came here had a, he was playing a French horn and he was good on it. But Dad said, "Well, we're kind of doing the country western theme and a French horn just doesn't quite get it." LAUGHS "But can you sing?" And he said, "No,

I don't sing." And Dad says, "I'm sorry but you're welcome to stay and you're welcome to come back anytime you want to but we just don't have a place for a French horn." LAUGHS Let him down pretty easy. We had a lot of people like that that would show up and some of them would claim they could sing and some of them couldn't. But every once in a while, they'd come along and be great on the piano or great on the guitar or do all of them. [Accordion too?] A little bit on the accordion, yeah. Dad made me learn two songs on the accordion and...my heart wasn't in it. You can't play any instrument or sing if your heart wasn't in it. Mine wasn't. So I struggled through two songs. Back then I was looking at all the accordion players I knew were either doing the oompa-pa polkas or schottisches or--and non-stop. And I'm watching these little old guys up on the stage, pumping that accordion, and going for 4-5 hours straight... I thought, that's no place for me. I don't want to do that. LAUGHS And like I said, my heart wasn't in it so I just let go of it. I practiced enough to learn two songs and enough to keep Dad off my back and that was about it. And I let that go. But I did the drums a little bit and learned to play harmonica... So I had my little niche in there.

1:02:48 But getting back to this song, we did this right in the garage on this place. And we had 4-5 people in the group then that [Asks his wife: Do you remember who was in the group when we did that? DOG BARKING] Brian's here, he's excited [David's son-in-law and daughter arrive, exciting the dog]. Rita, was Butch and Junior still in then? R: I believe so. D: Yeah, because Butch was doing the rhythm guitar and I think his brother, Junior, was still alive. Junior sang like Johnny Horton. Had a great, great voice. And I think he was only like 56 or something when he was working out in Oregon or California. And dropped dead right at work. Heart attack. Way to go. It was like bam, down he went and that was it. But at that time, I'm thinking that Butch Green, his real name was Alvin, he played rhythm bass and Junior, which was Frank Green, played lead guitar and sang like Johnny Horton. I mean, he did "Whispering Pines" and "The Mansion You Stole" and all those songs, right to a T. We went out and did shows for the fair and different occasions. He was a big hit. He did real well. And Butch mastered the Johnny Cash type rhythm on his guitar so whenever we did some of Johnny Cash's stuff, like "Folsom Prison" or any of those, Butch could just knock that right out. He was great.

1:05:36 But getting back to this song--and there was probably two or three other people involved that my old memory ain't bringing it up right now--but right in the garage, repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly, we did this song over and over and over again until Dad thought it was good enough. And I think this particular song, he only had like 125 copies made. And one other one he did was "Beyond those City Lights" and "Go Then" was the flip side of it. And he only had like 25 of those made. And we've lost them someplace. I know he got a lot away. All the taverns around this area had them on their jukeboxes and that was pretty novel. But somehow or another, we ended up with not one copy of that one that I can find. But this one here, actually I can say I was honored to live part of this, and suffered through some of it. And I had a feeling, you know, [begins to read lyrics from "Iron Worker Blues"] "You sit way up there in the sky and you watch birds go flying by," and all of that's true. You do. And sometimes you wonder why

things have turned out the way they are and why you're there. And if you ponder on it when your hands are cold and shivering, yeah, you can get the blues pretty easy. End of the day, you're about froze to death: "You wait for the boss to say come down" and [reads but doesn't speak the next line: "You wait for a job that's on the ground."]

1:07:19 Once in a while you do get a job that's on the ground. We had a job, in between jobs I guess you could say, it was a wintertime job and they needed to replace the—now this was back in White Pine--in the wheel house that we built, they had these big cable drums that would wind up the cable that brought the bucket up out of the mine shaft. And on each cable drum—I mean these things were huge--on each cable drum there was a sleeve that went on 'em that was grooved. So they would start the cable out in the grooves and it would make the cable travel and follow itself over so it would wind evenly. And we had—I think the millwrights were on strike so we kind of snuck in there and got this job. It paid very well but, boy, we ruined a lot of clothes with that millwright oil. Oh man that stuff would stink. Drill oil. And that was our one on the ground job that I can remember that paid real well. It wasn't that bad of a job. It was warm. Mostly cutting torching, getting the old sleeves off and getting ready for the new ones. And that was probably a three week job and that was--we had a deadline on that one--so it was kinda under the gun. We had to move on it.

1:09:03 Like any place, you get paid every two weeks. "You wait for pay day to roll around." And by that time you're, by the time you pay everything off, you're pretty broke. But back then, my brother and I were making \$5.10 an hour, and we were making good money. [I was making a buck and a quarter an hour then.] Yup. And like down at the mill in Mellon, it was \$1.33 after you were there a year. But back then, gas was like 32 cents a gallon. You didn't need a big pile of money to make ends meet either so \$5.10 an hour was pretty nice. And then we had to pay our union dues out of that and constantly wearing out clothes and trying to buy a better grade of tools and paying off the bar bill and food expenses and--lucky we had Mom home here to take care of our clothes. Unfortunately, looking back at it, I don't think I ever left any change in my pocket even but she always took care of us. Anyway, that was waiting "for pay day to roll around." So it hasn't changed much.

1:10:33 "You hook a choker around the beam" is the start of the next verse here. And that's to swing them into place. A choker is a cable with a loop on each end. One loop hooks to the hook on the crane, the headache ball on the crane. And basically all you're going to do is putting a slip knot on the beam. If you don't get it right in the center and the crane starts to lift the beam and it will slide to one side or the other and possibly drop out. And that's what the next verse here, "The choker slips and the pusher screams." The pusher is the guy on the ground, usually highballing the crane operator. So the crane operator has to set it back down and he goes to center the choker again and re-lift it. And having someone barking at you could make you mean, or just having to re-do things--that gets at you after a while. [This refers to the lyric "It's sure enough to make you mean."] "You put your spud wrench in the hole." Now your spud wrench is a long wrench with like a rat tail end on it so you can align the red iron and put a bolt through

it. Because most of this, all the red iron is prefabricated and a lot of times it doesn't line up and you, you know, when you're stretching this building, sometimes the whole framework to make that one hole fit, that helps square the building up a lot of the times. Sometimes the hole is just in the wrong place and then you gotta bring a torch up and make your own hole. But that's what the spud wrench is. You stick it in the hole and pry the two holes together and then the next hole over, you stick a bolt in it and tighten it down. So you're doing all of this with two hands, so you're holding the spud wrench with your shoulder, holding it in place, and you stick a bolt in the hole. And for some reason or another, the nut doesn't want to spin on 'er like it should so you holler for somebody to "hold the roll." And that's what that means. And he holds that bolt from rolling while you're running the nut on. And usually that . . .

1:13:14 . . . Well, going back to my first duty, on my first job, was to sit outside the work shack. I had a bag of bolts on one side and a bag of nuts on the other side. And I would thread nuts and bolts together. Thread nuts and bolts together. Thread nuts and bolts together and throw them in another bucket. And that's the ones you'd take up in your work apron so you'd have both parts together. And I did that like for two days. I was ready to go crazy but I made it through that tough test.

01:13:56 Now we're talking about, "You put your spud wrench in the hole." Ok. That's what we did. Someone hollers, "Hold the roll." Stop that bolt from spinning. Tighten it up. So you're doing all of this with your shoulder and two hands and you still need help. Luckily, there's somebody close to you that can skid 'er over and give you a hand with that, while you're hanging there. And the next verse here, "You take the rod wrench from your hip." Now you're doing a different kind of steel construction here. You're rod tying. You're tying rod together, reinforcing rod. And to get this to stay in place while they're pouring concrete over it, you gotta wire-tie it. I got fairly decent at it so I could get it done. There was guys that were just totally on fire on this. They could tie four times faster than me. And what you would do is you had a roll of wire in a carrier on your hip. And your rod wrench was your side cutter pliers. And you'd cut a strand of wire, wrap it around the intersection of the two reinforcing rods and you'd give it a couple of wraps and then you would twist it so it would stay in place. And as you're twisting it, to keep one side of the twist from breaking, you always had to pull up on it and twist, pull up on it and twist. And what he's talking about here is if your rod wrench slips while you're pulling up on that, you're pulling it up hard and it would come up and whack yourself in the chin. And "It's enough to make you quit." LAUGHS So you just keep doing it with your lip smarting. LAUGHS Or you drop that wrench down the hole too and that's a goner because you can't get through the reinforcing rod to get down and get it. It's gone. So you try not to drop that one. "Seems like you can't never gain. It's either got to snow or rain. Where you get so cold you feel no pain. And you get them ironworkers blues." Got that cold. Lived it, did it. Part of the reason I joined the Marine Corps. LAUGHS

01:16:30 "They let you work eight hours a day." See, there's guys that would work longer than that. But, belonging to the union, you've got to watch 'er. So sometimes it feels like you're

limited to where you have a little bit of energy you want to burn up yet and you're getting to a point in the job where you want to finish what you're doing, move on to something the next day. But you still have to punch out when the whistle blows. So then here you are. "But you're so darn broke you gotta stay." On and on we go. "On Friday night you're on your way, with dirty clothes and only half your pay. You know darn well what Ma's gonna say." Yup. I had 'em. I had them ironworkers' blues. I was only there for a year and a half. LAUGHS [It's a fantastic song and you did a really great job. LAUGHTER ] "Ironworkers Lament" too...I tell you what. [Yeah, that was another great song.] That was great. [That's another thing. That's a good song. I haven't yet found out who this guy is. I've got a couple of angles I need to pursue.] Well, I tell you what, that guy would have fit into that group here, right now. He had a great voice. He had a great voice. [A little bantering ensues as David's daughter and son-in-law are leaving.]

1:18:20 [Well, the last thing I wanted to know is... You told me that you were one of the performers in that...] Oh yeah, I was the guy, if I belonged to an orchestra, I don't know what instrument would make that noise--or a band. LAUGHS In this case it was the acetylene tank or the oxygen tank on the acetylene torches. Dad wanted a sound that sounded like somebody pounding on a beam, driving a wedge, or driving it into place but he didn't want it in synch with the rhythm of the song. He wanted it to sound natural. Probably the only time in my life I kept falling into rhythm and he was getting so mad at me. LAUGHS "No, we don't want it in rhythm," he would say. All right, all right, all right. So they would start the whole thing over again because Dave was screwing up, you know? And I had to concentrate on, you know, on not going in rhythm. This is kind of funny because all the time Dad's performing and running the little band. He's always going, snapping his fingers or doing something to snap his wrists to keep us in rhythm and then all of a sudden [LAUGHS] he wants to go the other way and don't get in rhythm. It was a struggle. It was just funny. That was so many good years and so many faces and people that have, jump into my mind, intermittently, and a lot of them I can't remember the names anymore. There were so, so many. And a lot of them were just neighbor people through the Mason, Ashland, Bayfield County area that would just come to the barn dances and, you know, after you've had a couple of sarsaparilla sometimes they'd get enough courage to get up on the stage and they'd blow us away. It was amazing what they could do. Like all these little band members searching for a band. They'd come out of the woodwork and it was totally amazing.

[I think I have what I needed which was great storytelling. Love the detail.]