

Ironworkers Documentation Project

AUDIO LOG FORM

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Contact: Diskin, Brian

Interviewer: Bucky Halker

Interview: Brian Diskin

Date: August 14, 2011

Place: Iron Workers Union International Convention, Sheraton on the River,
Exhibit Hall, Chicago, IL

Other people present: None

Background noise: This interview was conducted at the IWU convention in the exhibit hall. Richards I were literally inside the history exhibit-display. Th hall is very noisy and the interview area very boomy.

Equipment used: Marantz PMD 661 digital recorder and Shure SM57 microphone.

Recording medium used: Transcend 8 gigabyte SD memory card, uncompressed WAV format.

Recording engineer: Bucky Halker

Summary description of audio interview contents:

Brian Diskin reviews in personal background, his ironworker history, his union activity, the current state of the trade and his local #380, younger works, the ironworkers' festival, and strikes.

Audio Interview Contents

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Topic

My name is Brian Diskin. I was born in 1953. 6/8 of '53. I reside at..ahh...between Champaign and Danville, a little town of Fithian, Illinois. [You've got me on that one.] It's in the middle of nowhere. [Now is that where you grew up too?] No, I grew up in the little town of Rankin, Illinois, which is south of Kankakee, about 60 miles. I went Rankin high school, grade school, and high school there. And then got into the apprenticeship in the ironworkers as soon as I got out of high school. I was 18. [Which local was it?] Ironworkers Local 380, Champaign, Illinois. [When, in the apprentice program or after, what kind of work were you doing in the ironworkers...rebar stuff?] Well, we started out... The old business agent gave you a little touch of all aspects of the work. He started most of us out in the rebar. Then over to metal buildings. And then structural, ornamental, and then finally into the glazing in the window and curtain wall style of work. A lot of heavy rigging.

1:08 [So was that in the local...Champaign-Urabana local, was that for all the ironworkers? It's not like Chicago where it got a little...] No, it's a mixed local. [It's a mixed local.] It's a mixed local so we do all that we do all aspects of the trade. [What kind of job sites have you worked on?] Well, one of the biggest was, of course, the Clinton Nuclear Powerhouse. All the major buildings on campus. The first tallest building in Champaign was a 21 story. And I was a first year apprentice pumpin' bolts on that job. But ahhh... We cover 17 counties in Central Illinois, so you may be doing a bridge on the interstate system or you may be out in the county doing a little county road or creek drainage ditch bridge. But, our major industry, which was in our area, is gone, which was the General Motors plant in Danville, where we used to have a lot of maintenance in that plant. Blaw-Knox down in Mantoon, where they used to make all the paving equipment. And we had a lot of maintenance in that plant. General Electric, Esco, where they made the grade line buckets in Danville. All those plants are gone. So our local now is not just a maintenance, as well as new construction, it's almost all new construction. Very little maintenance left, since most of the businesses have packed up and moved on.

2:33 [How many members do you have in that local?] 258. Hmm...146 active journeyman, 42 apprentices, and the rest are retirees and pensionnaires. [Are you still running an apprentice program there?] Yes, we still have an apprentice program. It's a four year program. They go to school Monday and Thursday nights. It runs concurrent with the school year, local school year. They work during the day and go to school 2 ½ to 3 hours a night, Monday and Thursday evenings. [Are you an officer in the union?] I'm the business manager of the local union. [What is that? What kind of work does that entail?] Well... Being the business agent, you can be a bail bondsman, marriage counselor, you do just about anything. But my main duties is I'm financial secretary/treasurer, so I run the books. I dispatch the men to the job sites. I handle all of the arguments between labor and management...ahh... jurisdictional disputes, where another craft is wanting to do our work. You go out and present your case and try to secure all the employment you can for our brothers.

3:45 [Are there many jurisdictional problems?] Every... Seems like every week there's something that comes up. Mainly with the laborer and the carpenters, because they're on a

nation-wide move to encompass our jurisdiction. [So they would get more work for their own members?] Exactly. It's easier to go after the organized than it is the unorganized. So it's easier, in other words, it's easier to steal other crafts' work than it is to go out and organize a non-union company. [Is there any organizing going on in your area?] Yes, I have a couple active campaigns on some metal building contractors. I try to follow them on every site. I have taken some of their best people and put them into the local union. And with the benefits that we offer, it's enticing for some to make the move. Some you can never get converted to come over, because the company lets them use all the tools and all the equipment to do side jobs on their own, so they feel loyal to these outfits. And ahh... But when they're done with them, they're done with them. No place for them elsewhere. No other place for them to go. So... [Is the university, are all those jobs union?] That's a... We have a minimum of... Anything over \$35,000 falls under the PLA that the east-central Illinois building trades has with the University of Illinois. [Project Labor Agreement: guarantees that all labor on the will be union. In exchange the union guarantees there will be no work stoppages or sympathy strikes.] Every project is under PLA if it's over \$35,000. And it's been beneficial for both. We just entered into a new 3-year agreement with them for the next series of PLAs so... It works rather well. [When did you become the business agent?] Ahh... 19 years ago I got elected. I was 21 years, 22 years in the field and I've been an agent going on 19 years.

5:40 [Now when you were in the field, did you work on other sites outside the district sometimes?] Oh yeah, when work was slow. I worked in Detroit, worked in New Jersey, worked in Dallas, Texas, worked in Montana. Ahh... Any place that had... East St. Louis, Chicago a lot. Hammond, in the steel mills. Wherever there was work, you went. A guy had a family to feed so you made sure you tried to bring a paycheck home of some type.

6:15 [I know we're going to talking about the festival in a little bit, but when you were in the field or even now, were there certain jokes or rituals or anything like that that you remember that the ironworkers in your local did?] Well... Every little job site, there's a lot of sayings that the boys come up with that... Most of them can't be repeated, but...ahhh... It just seemed like, you know, we always looked at it that it was a joint venture. So it was eight hours work for eight hours pay. That's one of the biggest speeches I give to the new kids coming in. You don't have to go out and kill yourself. You don't have to run for these contractors, but it's a good honest day's work for an honest day's pay. There's a lot of old sayings, but most of them, like I say, you can't repeat so.

7:11 [How did you see your trade change from the time you came on, it was probably, what, in the 70s...?] Yeah, 71 was when I got in. [How did it change from then until now? What are the changes you've seen?] Well, you look at the technology, it's came so far. But what we used to do with chain falls and bull work. Now there's a...the equipment is so much better. When I first started, we climbed iron. Now, with all the safety and OSHA regulations, you ride in a man lift, a scissor lift or a JLG. There is no more climbing of the iron. It takes a lot for the guys to get used, not having the freedom of movement that they used to have COUGH and a lot of them

rebel to wearing all of the safety equipment. But all in all, it's been better for the industry. But the work has gotten a lot better with the more tools that the companies have finally started purchasing and being able to use rather than the old bull method. We did a lot of bull work back in the day. But now with the new equipment, it makes it so much easier. Even connecting, they do it on the lifts now where even an old man like me can do it again, now. But when you don't have to climb that iron, your knees are wore out, your back's wore out. All the heavy lifting over the years. Then the climbing really wears your joints out so... So it's been better for everybody. The new kids, the youth that's coming in, don't have the drive. It's hard to instill work ethic into people if they don't have it. The young kids today, they want things now. They don't want to save. They don't want to work for it. They think you owe them something. Hmm... But when I came in, there was a bunch of old screamers. Everybody we worked for, they were rough, tough mean old boys. And they busted their ass every day, all day long. Then they drank beer in the evening. The next day, they did it again. But they did it every day. The youth today, they just don't have the drive or the attitude. With the way the Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training regulates it, you have to take whoever scores the highest. Hmm... And then the interview process, you look at some of these kids that are applying. They have college degrees and you know they're not going to stay in...in this for...and make a career out of it. They're using it for a stepping stone until something comes up in their field. They're only after the dollar, not the pride in the work. I'm a second generation. My father was in the business. And we were preached union at the dinner table. Ahh...and to help the older member in the local. I can remember my Dad just chewing my ass if I'd be, have a slack moment and see an old timer struggling with a piece of iron packet over to where it goes. And if I didn't go over and lend a hand, he chewed me up one side and down the other. Well, the youth today think that the older member has their job. And they don't understand that one day, they're going to be in that position. It's hard to teach them to be able to look out for their older brother, because they're going to be one one day themselves. And it's the hardest thing to get across to them. I give them all the same speech when they come in. Pay your bills on three days a week. The fourth day is your playing around money. Your fifth day goes to the bank because you're going to need it. This is not a forty hour a week job. Don't go out and over extend yourself which, on apprenticeship nights, I go out and look at that parking lot. There's \$40 and 50,000 pickup trucks out there. [I was going to ask you about that. CHUCKLE] And it just absolutely... I never owned a new truck in my life, let alone have something like \$40-50,000 to drive out onto the job sites. And tear it all to heck while you're... I had beater vehicles that you just drove to work. Left your tools in it and you had a good vehicle to play around in. But yhey want it now and they don't want to wait for it. And...they have beautiful homes that when the work gets slow, they can't afford. And it's hard to get that point across to them. Don't over extend yourself because there's weeks you may only get... The weather could be absolutely crappy where you don't get but two hours a day, five days a week. You come home with a ten hour paycheck, and your bills are based on 60. It just doesn't work. It's hard to get across to them. They.... They just don't quite und... When they go through the first down cycle, after that they

realize that what you've been preaching to them, works. My Dad told me that when I was first got in. When I got in, unemployment was \$51 a week. You know you didn't have much money to play with so you always tried to save. But ahh...a lot of them just don't grasp that idea even today, when unemployment is \$500 a week. You know? They just don't get it. Until they go through one down cycle. Then they know. Then they come up and say, "I see what you mean. I see why you told us that now." But ahh... It's just different. They don't have the... There used to be a lot of the father and son, but now with the way the Bureau's got their nose in it. You have to take whoever scores the highest. And I always look at the guy's hands whenever you're interviewing them. If he's got hands of a pianist, I don't need him, because he's never done a day's work in his life. He scored very well and maybe very intelligent. But he's not cut out to do any ironwork. It is a... It takes a little different breed to be one.

13:20 [One of the things that I've noticed about the ironworkers that I've talked to, you know, your age and some of the old guys that I've been talking to. Ironworkers seemed like a pretty bright people. I noticed that you are able to do problem solving.] Very much so. [Do you see that in the work here?] Well, one of the, one of the jobs that come to mind most... You know, it's very easy for an engineer to set down when he's got an eraser on his pencil to draw this type of work up. There's an incident that came up over at the Clinton Power Plant. It was a full pan weld inside of a... You had to wedge yourself into a corner, to be able to see it, and it was a full penetration weld where it would have been very simple for them to turn the clip around and make it so you could weld it from the opposite side. But the engineer wouldn't listen. So finally one day, we were having a tough time getting that weld made in there because you couldn't see it, let alone, even with the mirrors. When you get used to welding with mirrors, everything is backwards. So when you think you're moving in the right direction, you're not. Finally I had to get the engineer down. I said, "Show me how to do it. I mean, it's very simple. And I'll show you how to fix it, but you're bright enough, you should have known how to design it to start with." He said, "Well, how would you do it?" And I said... And he said, "Well, that would work." "Why didn't you think of it? You're the one that's a college grad and you should have all the drafting skills. Couldn't you see this wouldn't work?" And you do this time and time again. The architects, I think every one of them ought to work in the fields for a little while so they see exactly how it is that these things fit. Then they wouldn't draw things up the way they do. You know? It may look beautiful when they're done but they are a pain in the ass and not cost effective to build. But you see it on almost every job. The hardest part ahh...with getting a architectural or engineering firm to understand is that it's not as simple as what they've drawn it...is to have them come out and look. To have them sit there and watch you try to do this, and to... There's just no way that you can get some of these things to fit together. So the intelligence level of the member who has been fighting these architects, so to speak, for years, come up with pretty aggressive ways that sometimes get the work done. But they are very ingenious in the way that they do get it done. We've moved some monster equipment that...ahh...the way the engineers have you try to rig it and do it that you can't do. But we sit down and we work it out. If the material withstands the pressure and if the cables and rigging

will handle it, we'll make it work. But most of them are very, very mechanical. They can do a lot of things with their hands. Some of them are very, very talented. I'm a mechanic as well, but... I like to think that most of us could do just about anything, because they're just mechanically inclined. I did get a few of that can't tie their shoes but... CHUCKLE ...but that's part of it.

16:46 [Some of the training or the experiences you get as an ironworker, do you have any hobbies related to that? Every now and then, I run into some guy that sculptures and doing art.] Well, there are a few of the guys. I've got one that does a lot of sculpturing and has actually sold a few pieces. I, myself, I do a little...fix farm machinery for the neighborhood farmers. I hung a sign out when I bought the farm and moved out into the country. Just hung a sign out there, "What now?" I mean, they come by with everything. From a broken aluminum lawn chair and they could buy a new one for \$10. [Laugh] But they want you to try to weld it up. It's about \$15-20 with electricity just to start the machine. We see a lot of that. A lot of them think they're welders until they come over and you fix what they've done. And you use 2-3 grinding blades to get it out of there but...then start all over from scratch but. I don't do a lot of fabrication because it... It cuts other people out of work. The shop division do that work. I may build something for my neighbor or something on that nature or something for myself. You get asked a lot to do that type of work, but it just cuts into someone else's job so you... I just don't do it. But mechanic wise, I've build pulling tractors. Ahh... It's been a... My son bought one eight years ago and couldn't work on it. And I never mess with diesel motors. I play with Harley Davidsons and build choppers and drag raced Chevys when I was a kid. It was always easy to work on motors or transmissions or something on that nature. And then now I, as a kit, bought one. Bought the manuals and got to talking to the right people and I build motors and tractors for...as a side line I suppose you would call it. I'm quite busy with it. It won the State of Illinois in 2009, the first year I worked on this gentleman's tractor. Built it from scratch and we won the state so, it keeps me out of the bar. It keeps me at home. Hmm... And that's... That's important, too, that you're home. I'm not out on the road but...ahhh... It keeps me, keeps my hand in it, it keeps me occupied, and I enjoy it. It's ahh... Before I started doing this, I used to stop quite a few evenings at the bar after work. That puts a pretty good strain on your home life. And that's something that...

19:35 We used to have a lot of heavy drinkers in the business. We don't any more. [Yeah, a lot of guys have commented about a lot less drinking.] A lot less drinking than there used to be. It used to be on a rain day, everybody would pour into the bars. Now they go home. With the laws the way they are, I think it has affected a lot of that, but I just don't think we have that mentality in the youth that's coming in to do that. There's a few that still do, but they lose their driver's license and then there's no place to work them on the bus route, especially in rural Illinois where we're from. If you're not in Champaign, on the bus route, if I send you to a county road bridge, there's no way you could get to it. So it's changed quite a bit that way. But participation level I see in the union meetings, we make it mandatory that the apprentice attend...used to be ten out

of the twelve union meetings a year. We reduced it to six because they're going to school two nights a week. And then they're out one week a month, about three nights. Most of them have kids and family events, but the participation in the union meetings, I don't know how to get them there. It's a very, very poor turnout. There's 10 or 12 or 15 of you that run the locals and the business side in a month's time. They just don't come. We've tried beer and sandwiches, everything but dancing girls to get attendance up. But I think you make them go to school and you make them go to the union meeting, you'd think they would get interested in the business and how things are run and the democratic process. But they do not show up. They just don't come to the meetings. Once they become journeyman, there's the same 15-18 guys that come to the meetings every month. Sometimes you don't even have enough to have a quorum to pay the bills. And I don't know how to get them there. We have a labor history class. I teach the foreman's class. I teach the steward class. We have a good gentleman who teaches labor history. [One of your members?] Yeah. Tim O'Neill teaches it. He's part of the local. And ahh...we show a lot of films prior to the meeting. Try to pick up anything that I can from your society, the labor history society, we get films from. And I show those DVDs before the union meeting, trying to get people interested in where we came from and how we got to where we are. The biggest effect I had out of them was when I showed the Haymarket Square riot film. And ahh...that got their eyes opened and what big business had done and old man McCormick, the way he owned the police. And shooting people and hanging people for donating \$2 to buy a printing press. It opened these guys eyes a little bit. So we tried to show something about every meeting, 10-20 minutes film. And in our library in the city of Urbana, they have a lot of short labor clips so it's helped... And I send a notice out with what the film is going to be, trying to get attendance up. We try to show those films before the union meeting. While the executive board's meeting, we'll have those films on. And then all of a sudden when it's hot and they've been working all day, they just don't come back into town for a union meeting. But I find that it's more difficult to get the young ones to participate.

23:14 We had a fire at the local union. It burnt all down. And the average age of the guys that were volunteering to work on it was my age and up. The young ones you had to force in...where...and there's four of them. We saved about half a million dollars building the building because we built it ourselves. But the participation always seems to be the old fellows, not the young ones. They want to reap the benefits, but they don't want to put their efforts out without some kind of reward. It's for the future. It's your union office. It's your history. It's your future to participate in. I don't know how to get them there. It's difficult.

24:04 [You've been involved in this festival...so tell me the history of the festival.] Well, the festival... I didn't get involved until... I believe it started in '83 or '84. It started out with just a group of guys that wanted to have some local competition. They got see where the lumber jacks have their competition. It's always been on TV, where they race up the poll, where they cut the logs off. Where they chop logs in two. Well, they set up six events. The first was the knot tying. There's six knots you have to tie, and the fastest time. [Do you tie them with rope or do

you...?] You tie them with hand line. [Yeah.] There are six different lines and you have to tie these knots and the fastest time wins the competition. And they have to be tied correctly. So there's a set of judges that watch them do the tying. The next is rebar tying competition. And it's... They tie a figure 8 tie, ten of them, in the fastest time. And you have to heal the wire and tighten it and do everything like you would if you were out on the bridge deck or out on the wall, tying up the bar. Then they have the split throw competition. It has to be 30 feet from the bull's eye. And they'll have a bull's eye target with 50 points in the center. Then it spaces out. You must stick the spud into that piece of plywood at 30 steps. Ahh... The next is the rivet throw competition. And it's just like they did years ago. They paint the rivets red hot, paint them red so they don't throw hot rivets because a lot of these kids are rookies. But you get a lot of the older fellas that like to participate. There are very few left that would know how to run the forge, how to heat the rivets. And we do a hot demonstration up there for it. There would be a pitcher who takes it out of the forge, throws them up. We have a scaffold set up, 14 feet tall, with a guy with a catch can. And he has to catch the rivet and then put it in the bucket. And they count how many that they can get done in a minute's time frame. And then the final competition is the World Champion Column Climb. It's 40 feet to the top. Used to be that there was no safety equipment on that column when we first started. [I was wondering about that.] Now there's harnesses on. The gentleman, you hook him up, and there's a retriever up top so where he does fall, he can only slip before it locks. And he's hung there and he's only a couple of inches away from the column. But that was to help the insurance for the festival. But it's amazing to watch a kid climb 40 feet straight up in 4 seconds, where most people can't walk along that beam. But when you got a guy that's busting in 4 sixes, 4 sevens, 4 one-twos, going up straight 40 feet, ah, it's something to see. It started out... When they got this first started, it was to raise enough money from the profits of this festival to put up the statue to memorialize the guys who lost their lives, working on the Mackinaw Bridge. Now it's turned into an... International doesn't sponsor it, but they will publish it and put it in the magazine to make aware when it is so that the locals can participate. But we have people coming from all over the country. They come in from the United States as well as Canada. We finally got the...raised enough funds with the help of the state of Michigan and the Bridge Authority. We got the monument placed last year. And it was... They commissioned a sculptor to do this and I can't quote the gentleman's name. But he used bolts, tools, equipment that they used to build this structure. And that's a copy of a man with his tool belt on. But there would be a torch as a leg bone. Rivets for fingers. Levels...nineties, all the tools that we would use to build that bridge is incorporated into this sculpture. And...at the unveiling... Two years ago was the unveiling. It was just absolutely well received. They've started the... the City of Mackinaw is what they call the Walk of Fame. And anybody, any member of the ironworkers of the international union can buy brick with your name and local number on it. And they're paving that whole area with brick pavers with guys' names on it who worked on the bridge. There's a lot of guys that have lost their lives who worked on the bridge who are in the hall of fame for the bridge. We had up above the little pizzeria down town, Jay Stillwell, who was a member of the Marquette Local, and worked on the

bridge. He had a little museum above the pizzeria where guys had brought in their... There was a picture... There was a diver's suit from when they worked down in the coffer [?] dams. From rivet tools, some spinning looms when they spun those big cables back and forth to suspend the bridge. And then five years ago they had a fire in the pizzeria and lost all that history. There was... Oh, it was absolutely devastating because there was guys who brought in their union books like you see out here. Their union books was in that museum. Their hard hats and a lot of their old tools. It was devastating. Hard hats from guys all over the country. Ahh... The festival was, when it first started, was kind of rough because there was a lot of boozing going on. Now it's a little more family oriented. We'll have got a climbing wall for the kids. There's... So it's gettin', trying to push it toward a little more family oriented. Mackinaw Bridge ain't very pretty to go up. Any time you're up in the straights up there, it's pretty and in the city, we're well received. That's one of the first and only places I ever really saw a sign that says "Welcome Ironworkers." [LAUGHTER]

30:32 [How long has it been going on, the festival?] I believe it started in '83 or '84. [How many people w up, would you say...?] Well, it just depends on what the economy is like. Last year we had 110 enter the world champion column climb. Ahh... Total attendance is probably 500 or 600 people that'll show up. And a lot of the locals will come by to watch the competition. We run the main event on Saturday where we run all the competition. Then on Sunday we'll have the world champion climb. And then we have the old-timers events where the old timers get up and throw the rivets. And a lot of the young kids can't pass them old timers. They'll throw 37-40 rivets in a minute and the old boy catching them, he can catch them and put them in that bucket. It is brings a lot of camaraderie with the young guys that have worked all over the country or the guys from Philadelphia that come up. There's guys from New York. There's people from California, as far away as Seattle come to compete. It's a good... It's a good time for everybody. There's food on the premises. The school has let us use their property and we have two permanent columns posted out there so we go in at the beginning of the competition, about a week before, they put the walls up so you don't throw spuds out into the trees and loose rivets. And they have a nice beer tent and food venders there and bands that play. So there's a lot of nice entertainment. But it has switched from mainly the old drinking and carousing and rough housing to more of a family orientated. People really enjoy coming. So I've been the announcer and the head judge for the last 22 years. The festival is going on this weekend. It got rained out all day yesterday. It was raining up there this morning when I called to see what they were doing. There's a chance of it breaking up, but there's a lot to do in one day, to run all those. And most of the guys probably won't stick around for Monday because they got to be back to work. We try to end the competition about 2 o'clock on Sunday afternoon so give a guys a chance for 6-8 hours a way to get home so they can get to work the next day. [Is there prize money or do they just get trophies?] Well, you get a belt buckle. First place for the world champion column climber is a \$1,000 gold belt buckle. And it gives them a little incentive, plus

\$500 cash. So... But to be able to go up that column under 5 seconds, let's just say, you have very little body fat on you. These kids got thighs that are huge and when they grab that iron, you can see the lats and the muscles in their back just ripple. But they train for this competition. They have a column in their own back yard and they'll practice a lot of hours. [Do you think the International will ever back this?] No, I don't think so because the chance of somebody getting hurt, that I don't think they want to be tied directly to it where they would sponsor it. But they will put it in the magazine. We've asked for donations from them before. Even though we call it the International Ironworkers Festival, but it's not really sanctioned by the international union. But we'll have a lot of the dignitaries come. The president of the organization has been there a couple different times. Guys that are head of the district council because Mackinaw splits local 340 and local 25 out of Detroit. They split right up by 75 (I-75 interstate highway) so their representatives are always there. And it's nice to see some of the big shots. Kenny Wall with the Triple Eye comes up and puts up a display. And...ahh...gives out a lot of information. Or Mack Wire who supplies most of the tie wire for all these companies has a display, makes a lot of donations to the festival. Carhartt comes and participates. It's a... It's a beautiful weekend for the guys. The weather is usually bone hot in the middle of the infield. There's no wind coming through. But these guys, we run start out with the knots, move right into the rods. So by the time those guys are...by the end of the knots, we're just moving right to the competition. I always save the column climb for last because that's what they all really want to see...is the youth. We have a gentleman out of 340, Frank MacIntyre, the business manager back in the 80s, was the world champion column climber while he was business manager. And today, at 62 years old, can still climb it in 6 seconds. And that's amazing. I don't believe I could get up in six seconds now. I don't think I ever could in the beginning. But... We're going to have a working man's climb competition. It's not really a competition, but the guy puts all his tools on, just like you would if you're out there working. You got your 6 or 8 pound hammer, hanging in the back. Your spuds, your crescents, your pins, bolts... and his hard hat on and his gear, and he'll climb it just like a working man's climb, to show the guy how it is. Because these young ones are training to race, not have anything around their waist. You know? But you put that 60 pound belt around your ass and try to climb that, it's a whole different ball game. And do that day in and day out. So... But the crowd enjoys it. We have a hot rivet demonstration where a lot of these. It's getting harder to find somebody who knows how to run that forge because a lot of the older fellas who did that are gone today. They've passed before us and we very seldom get a riveted bridge but every once in a while, you get a railroad trestle.

[I was talking to somebody about that. Some of these old bridges now, we have them now, you see the old INAUDIBLE?] Yeah. And we have an older gentleman, he passed away 3-4 years ago. He was an old heater. And he taught us. So there's like 5-6 guys that are my age, in their mid-50s, that know how to run the forge and how to get them to the right temperature. But to get a picture... You know, we try to set the forge as close as possible, when you do have a repair like that. Because to get a guy that could throw it two stories where they used to do it all day long, to practice, why, you throw a cherry red rivet 30 feet to somebody and he's not familiar

with how to rattle the can to keep it in there. Or used to using the tongs to pick it out and stuff it in the hole, and then have the buckler hold up against it, while the driver rounds and mushrooms that head, it's a different ballgame. These young kids never done it.

[Why did that technology disappear?] Well, the structural rib bolt came in. Then the...which...had splines on it and you could torque it up and receive tie irons because you always had to bolt the iron up with connecting bolts, and then align the holes before you could...and make sure they were all tied iron before you could ever go to the rivet. Well, with the bolt...kept the iron aligned and you could draw it up tight and just slowly but surely, the technology got better in the bolt making and the tensile strength of them. And now even the June bolt, as it's called, where you tighten it from the bolt side. And when it gets to the right torque, it snaps that end of the bolt off that's in that little June gun. You know where we used to carry big heavy impact, that probably weighed 70-80 pounds that you lugged around with an inch air hose all day long, tightening the bolts. Now you've got electric pistol grip torque gun that you can handle with one hand and 110 electricity. So....and the June bolt would just hold the nut, turn the bolt itself, with that splined end on it. And when it gets to the right torque it snaps the end off and you move to the next one. Technologies came a long ways in the fastener method. But there's a couple old bridges that go over...that we still replace the rivets in. And then when you do have a gang, you got to hunt to find the right people. And you got to have it set up close enough where they can take it right out of the forge and not have to throw them 20-30 feet because you put a lot of them into a drink. CHUCKLE. If it's over the water, you hear them sizzle when they hit and then they're gone.

[How do you use the knots? How is that used still?] Well, we still use a lot of different knots in...when you're tag lining a line piece up. There are six basic working knots that we use most of the time, but we were taught in the apprenticeship school 33...how to tie 33 different knots. And with the technology today, you don't use the carrot bend. You don't use...hmmm.... In rescue today, you don't use the running bowline or the French bowline or the Spanish bowline, where you could tie it where the legs run through it and line around the back of them to let people down when they were injured. Now they have the harnesses or the scaffolds but you use the bowline, bowline bite, running bowline. You use a clove hitch. Timber hitch and half hitches is about what you use in the regular working day any more. But a lot of those special, where you take the pressure out, like a carrot bend in. You take the pressure on a damaged part of the line and tie the knot around it so you are still utilizing the line, whether it would take the stress off of that frayed or damaged portion of the line so... But timber hitch, barrel hitch, scaffold hitch where you tie planks on it. You use those. A lot of the other knots you do not.

[What about splicing cables. Is that still done?] Well, it's... Now-a-days, we used to... When we were in apprenticeship school, we used to make our own chokers and sell them to the contractors, to give you experience in how to splice cable. Now if it doesn't have that tag on it,

we can't make it and sell them. We don't teach cable splicing today, not in any of our classes anymore, because of the liability. Someone would come out and have that wedge swedged dog-knot on them, very few back spliced or eye spliced chokers you ever seen. They're splices and got that wedge swedge on the end of them and it has to have that tag on them or you can't use them. But we used to do that straight line splice, eye splice, and used to teach that in the classes. I learned out to do it when we were in school. Our old, the knot tier or knot instructor, was a real butt head. He'd have you tie the knots behind you back. So you wouldn't... There were several that you worked with every day, he'd make you tie them behind your back. So if you couldn't tie them, you kept practicing until you was able to pass. The ones you used every day, they'd become old hat to you. You just throw them on and you're done. But now a lot of companies come out with a retractable for your hand line. So when you're tag lining a piece up, there's no sitting there, taking the time, corralling your line back up. Just...when they unhook it and throw it down, and zzzzzuuuuup, here it comes right back to you. It's not the same but... And it's really hard to get a good strain on something that small when you got to put a big piece of iron in place. Things are changing. It sure changed a lot in the 40 years I've been in. From grunt and growl to the new equipment that makes it so much easier.

42:58 [Well, I think I've asked everything I needed to. Do you want to add anything?] No, not really. I just... that I think that the industry as a whole is changing for the better. I don't know how we're going to get the youth of today involved in the way that I came up or my Dad's generation when they came through. How to instill the pride in the business and to get the...brotherhood to where they look out for one another a little more instead of me me me... It should be "we"... Like the man said, "There's no "I" in team." And if you can get these young ones to look out for the older members and to work as hard as what we did when we were coming through, they need to do so or the..hmm...the pride is the biggest thing I think in this... It takes a different breed of person to be an ironworker. I always tell these young ones to kiss her goodbye every morning because it might be the last time you see her. Don't go to bed fighting at night. All it takes is one slip and you're done. So make sure you kiss her goodbye every morning. And I tell them young wives don't be chewing his ass. He's worked hard all day. You may not understand it. But... And the young ones that do get it are the future of this organization. You can nurture that so they can pass that information down to the next generations. Because I don't think there are robots that can do our work. I really don't. They can do some of the welding I suppose but they got to put those sticks together. And the high rise is the future. Modular construction is coming where you set a floor at a time. They do that in Japan and other places now. You don't see it here. Not yet, but I think you will, eventually.

[Did you ever go on strike at all in your local, in your time there?] We were out three different times back in the '70s and '80s. Over a nickel or a dime. Working conditions have always been fairly good in my little area. We haven't had many issues in the last 7 or 8 contracts that I've negotiated. We haven't had much issues except when work's down. You have no leverage so

you can't expect a pay increase even though gas was \$4 a gallon. If you don't have any work, you don't have any leverage to shut any jobs down so...to get your ultimate goal. Up there, they make about \$42 an hour and where we're at is \$30.03. But the cost of living is so much different between the city and what it is down in the land of steaks and shakes and grain elevators, ya know? It's a big difference. The two, couple times we were out, we were out 2-3 months. They offered a nickel. Went on strike for a dime. Out for six weeks to settle for a nickel. There was no rhyme or reason to it back then but...well, while I've been an agent, we have not been out on strike. I've always been able to negotiate a fair increase. The last two contracts were a year contract a piece, but we didn't have any work but was still able to get enough money to keep the health and welfare with no cuts to it and put a little money in the annuity, but nothing on the check. And then work is here this year and I'm up for a contract again in May. And with the work load the way it's going to be, we'll be able to get a decent increase. But a guy has to be very careful about pricing himself out of the market. And the young kids think we ought to make what Chicago or Joliet makes. And our cost of living isn't as high, but I don't want to price ourselves out of the market to where another craft could... If you get too overpriced, the carpenters and the laborers in my area, the carpenters' total package is about the same as ours. They make a little more on their check, but they have a little less benefits. So you don't want to price yourself too high where they'll use another craft to do your work, or you'll let the non-union that are working for \$9-\$10-\$12 an hour. You've got to be very careful. It's a fine line to walk. The guys all want all the money you can get. Sometimes when you make those decisions, it's not very popular. This last election, I just ran in June, and I never had any opposition other than my first election. And a young kid was complaining about I didn't bring the contract back to the body, to ratify the vote. But we had to earmark the money into the benefits or we weren't gonna get any increase at all. They offered zero. Rolled the language over, nothing. And after 4-5 meetings for negotiations, we ended up getting them to cover the cost of the welfare increase and what we needed into the pension or the annuity to keep that solvent. But if I brought that dollar five back to the guys, they wouldn't have voted to put it on the health and welfare. They wanted it on their check. If I would have brought it back, we wouldn't have gotten anything. That was the topic for the last two contracts, that I didn't bring it back to the body to vote on, to ratify. But that's a decision that you have to make as a business manager. You're looking for what's best for the whole group, not just a few individuals. If you can't make it on \$30.03 an hour, you're not going to make it on \$31.03. Chuckle. You know? It's just that simple. You do what's best. Sometimes it's not a very popular decision, but that's why you make the big nickel for being the boss.

[Hey, it's really been a pleasure. Thank you very much.] I hope it was helpful. [Yes, it was! Thanks!]

END 49:22