

Iron Workers Documentation Project

AUDIO LOG FORM

Interviewer's recording no(s): BH IW 1 [Taqee 1]

Contact: Michael M. Taqee (ne Taylor) [born 1960]

Interviewer: Clark "Bucky" Halker

Interview:

Date: December 20, 2012

Place: Seven Ten Lanes, 1055 E. 55th St., Chicago, IL 60615

Other people present: None

Background noise: The interview was conducted at a restaurant-bowling lane in a large dining room-bar area and there's quite a bit of room noise from the stereo and people coming and going, including the waiter. The Seven Ten Lanes are located in Hyde Park. Mr. Taqee chose this site for the interview.

Equipment used: Marantz PMD 661 digital recorder with internal microphones.

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

Recording engineer: Bucky Halker

Transcription: Toni Wright Halker

Summary description of audio interview contents:

Michael Taqee was an iron worker with IWU Local 63 for more than two decades. However, he also became an independent contractor with close ties to the IWU for a number of years. In addition, in 2012 he became a Chicago firefighter. Taqee was one of the firefighters involved in a class action discrimination suit dating back to the firefighter examination in 1995. In the interview we cover his personal background, his iron worker career, his life as a contractor, unions in America, the problems of the local and national economy, and his current position as a Chicago firefighter.

Audio Interview Contents

Counter

No./Time

Topic

00:01

BH: Tell me your name.

MT: My name is Michael M. Taquee.

BH: Tell me about that name as long as we're on it. It's T-A

MT: Q double E.

MT: I was born Michael Taylor and in 1992 I changed my surname from Taylor to Taquee. Um, not for any religious reasons or anything, but I wanted a name that reflected my culture and my heritage. As I begin to travel around the earth, especially when I went to Africa, I realized that black people from America that still held on to their previous slave owner names, were treated differently, and they didn't respect us as being free and independent.

MT: And they would typically laugh at black people when they asked what your name was and you gave them a European name, they would laugh and say "No, what's your real name?" Well, of course, we didn't know. And, in my research, I started realizing this was one of the systemic problems that black people have in America, having no identity after 14 generations of slavery, we don't know who we are. And, this causes problems in society, problems in the communities and I wanted to have a, a sense of self. And, I have two young boys and I didn't want them to grow up as brain dead, for lack of a better phrase, as I was. I wanted them, to a, it's difficult to respect and honor other people's names and cultures, if you don't have one of your own. So, I wanted a name that reflected that, so that they would have a sense of pride of who they were, and would be more inclined to respect other people. [The song in the background is by Styx, a famous Chicago band from the 1970s and early '80s]

MT: Much in the same way, if I said "Juan Hernandez" you don't have to guess that I am talking about a Latino. If were to say Lee Mu Ming, you knew I was talking about a Chinese. I wanted my name to have that type of distinction, so that when you see or hear me, you knew that I was a black man.

02:11

BH: What year were you born?

MT: 1960.

BH: 1960. Were you born here in Chicago?

MT: Yes, I was born here in Cook County at 39th and King. I spent my first 22 years over there before I branched out and got a couple of apartments and finally bought my first house in Miller Beach, Indiana.

BH: Oh, Miller Beach, that's a great little town. Yeah, I've got friends over there, that's an interesting little spot.

MT: Yeah, grandma moved there in '73. 73-74, and as she started to get older, ah, we knew we needed to go out there, so we were here and we didn't know how to get out there. I got into the iron workers in '85, and when I decided to buy my first piece of property. I wanted to buy a two unit or something here in the city, and my grandma decided, and it was ingenious, she said, "listen, I have this inheritance for you, I'll give you part of it now, if you move out here with me." Well, it was a no brainer, because I kind of wanted to be there for her anyway, so when she ah, ah, put the down payment down on my first home, vis a vie and inheritance, she was gonna give me anyway, and her logic is, if I see what you're doing with it now, I won't have to worry about you screwing it up.

BH: Ah, well, she's smart.

MT: Yeah, she was really. She was 100 when she died, so she really carried the family. And ah, so that's how I ended up in Miller Beach. I stayed there 12 years and then ah, real estate started skyrocketing in the city. Grandma passed away in '95 and I decided I '97 to come back to the city. Started buying property and ah . . .

BH: So, did you sell the place in Miller Beach, then?

MT: Yes, I did. It pretty much tripled in value. It was a small home, a starter home, but I loved it a lot and ah, it, it would have been paid for in 2001, the year that 911 struck and then the economy started to go downhill a little bit. Most people didn't see, I saw the writing on the wall. It took to '08 before it collapsed, but ah, started to see the changes and America was changing after 911 had changed this country forever. And nothing quite stayed the same.

04:27

BH: Well, how did you get from, you went to high school in Chicago then?

MT: Ah,

BH: High school here or?

MT: Yeah, I went to Dunbar Vocational High School, 30th and King Drive. Ironically, the firehouse I'm at, is four blocks away on 34th and King Drive. I used to walk past

there all the time coming home from school and I even used to swim. They used to have swimming pool over there at that firehouse 40 years ago.

BH: Wow.

MT: I used to swim there, so I went to Dunbar at 30th and King Drive and we grew up on 39th and King Drive.

BH: Yeah.

MT: I majored in architecture there, ah, I knew at the age of 13 exactly what I wanted to do with my life. It's ironic that I was able to ah, to, God blessed me to be able to do most that which I wanted to do. Ah, I-I knew, I wanted, I thought I wanted to be a carpenter until I understood a little more about architecture and then I knew that I wanted to be an architect. So, I majored in architecture.

BH: Wow.

MT: I only had two loves in my life, and that was architecture and the fire department. Those were the only two things I ever wanted to be.

BH: Yeah.

MT: And I had fantasies about, about astronauts, but that went away quickly.

BH: Yeah.

MT: Ah, I really wanted to be an architect. I thought I could pull it off and I wanted to be a fireman, and I thought I could pull that off.

BH: Yeah. Well how did you get from Dunbar then to being an Ironworker? That took a few years, right?

MT: Yeah. I graduated in '78 out of Dunbar. I started going to school, at that time, you could get government money to go school if you didn't have anything. So, it was difficult to go to Circle Campus [University of Illinois Chicago], if you couldn't afford it and, at that time they had the best architecture program in the state. So, I decided to take some of my minor courses at a junior college, so I was going to Kennedy King [Community College] majoring in ah, architecture, and then I started working at a company called Maurey Manufacturing that next month. I graduated in June, went to work for Maurey Manufacturing in July and in August, I started night school at Kennedy King College. So, I done that for, until 1980. May of 1980, my first son was born and it became difficult to ah, stay in school. I needed to really start thinking about my finances because I wasn't working for me anymore. I had a son now, so that pushed me out of school, I couldn't, I couldn't maintain going to school. I decided to work full time. So that's what I did in 1980, ah, I just continued to work. Tried to raise my son, and ah, had

visions of going back to school, but it always came second to raising my son. I never got back.

BH: Yeah.

07:07

MT: Um, in 1984, Leonard Japczyk, he was the ah, apprentice coordinator at Local 63. He called my old high school teacher, Robert Heersema at Dunbar Vocational, and they were looking for potential iron workers. What they were looking for was ah, quote, unquote, “minorities” to take the ironworker test and they were hopefully looking for individuals with an architecture background. So, my high school teacher called me up along with a couple of ah, ah my ah, a couple of my other classmates and ah, we met Leonard Japczyk at the ah Swift Mansion on 45th and Michigan and he pretty much gave us an overview of ah, being an ironworker and he wanted to know if we would be interested. At that time, I had just got laid off from Spiegel’s and I wasn’t working. But just the word architecture, I was in. And, once I understood it, I realized this is the flip side of the coin. Instead of being an actual architect, I get to actually build the buildings.

BH: Right.

MT: I was hooked-hook, line and sinker. So, I took the test, done well on it, and I started in a Local 63 in October of 1985. And ah, stayed there until December of 2011. Ah, I totally enjoyed it. I absolutely loved it. I still think and act like an ironworker.

BH: Sure.

MT: Ah, for, I walk into buildings, I look at the construction automatically. I don’t even, I can’t even think about it. It just comes out but ah . . . [Waiter arrives and knocks dishes on the table. Pause in recording.]

BH: Check one, two. It’s working again. Um, well, when we left off here you were just talking about getting into the trade. Do you remember some of your, the early jobs you had buildings, or places, what that was like starting in the trade?

MT: Yeah, I knew ah, I remember my first job-the first day, like it was yesterday. My first job was 123 Wacker, ah, it was run by a company called PPG. They’re not in business anymore. Tommy Roberts was my first superintendent and I was excited as all get out to ah, be there. It was a great job, a great career and I-I just remember that I couldn’t sit still, I couldn’t be more excited to be there. I’d come in with my brand new overalls, brand new tools and so forth, looking every bit the green rookie that I was. And, ah, that job started as the catalyst for lack of, ah how should I put this, my lifestyle changed the day I started that job. My entire life, I should say, changed ah, they way I thought, the way I gauged people, the way I approached life in general. I started meeting people and ah, because I was in the field of architecture, now, my ah, I’m actually back to studying again. So now I’m ah, I’ve turned into a student of the game again. So, it’s all about architecture. It started sending me back to when I was a, I believe I was eight years

old when I ah, I knew I'd be in the field of architecture some place. I just thought I was going to be a carpenter at eight, but I remember the firefighters . . . [Interrupted by waiter]. I remember, I was, I was eight and ah, the Bailey house was on fire at the end of the block. I don't know if you remember Bill Bailey, used to be a radio personality for WLS?

BH: Yeah, I remember the name, yeah.

11:15

MT: Okay, well, his parents lived on our block. They were the last white people left on our block. Their, their house caught on fire, a beautiful red brick at the end of the street and it caught on fire, and I remember, almost coming in tears because the building was burning down. I just it was the best-looking building on the block. And, I was upset. The building was ah, burning down, because I knew what they were doing at that time, the building would burn, the bulldozer would come right behind-it's still smoking and they would tear it down. They weren't allowing us to rebuild. I didn't understand what gentrification was at that time. But that's what was going on. So when the Bailey's house was on fire, burning, ah, Mr. Bailey was still in the building. We didn't know, the firefighters went in and came out with Mr. Bailey, saved his life and saved the building! I thought that was the coolest thing in the world. These guys looked like Batman to me, man, and the firefighters were like Superman. That, that day, I knew then, ah, ah, that I was in love with architecture beyond my dreams. I didn't know that I was ready to cry over this building that's not mine. But the firefighters looked like Superman to me and that's who I wanted to be. So, I knew at that time, those were the things that I loved and I never got away from it. The bulldozer ended up tearing the Bailey's house down a few days later away. But they were trying to save it, because it was still Bailey's parents, they had plans for that area at Wacker anyway so. I'm sorry that I went all the way back until I was eight years old but ah,

BH: No, that's all right, that's good. Interesting perspective. Yeah, so 123 Wacker was that on east or . . .

MT: It was on the east side of the street. 123 East Wacker, it was across the street from ah, Morton Salt.

BH: Oh, OK.

MT: Which is a, I'll always remember Morton Salt because, not Morton Salt, just Morton, but they made salt, ah, mostly. That's what I remember them from, but what they became ah, and famous for was they were responsible for putting that O ring in the shuttle that exploded. And ah, I never forgot it. I remember standing on the, on the 26th floor looking down, I wish I had had that picture, I couldn't find a lot of them. And I remember looking down at that building going "Wow", you know people around the whole country are talking about this company, that I'm looking down on, that's right across the street from me. I'll never forget that. That was probably one of the things that

I remember most about working at 123 Wacker.

BH: What kind of work were you doing there?

13:53

MT: We started off, we had ah, he turned out to be a good friend of mine, John Salcetti. We were in the mechanical room and we were insulating the mechanical room. At that time, iron workers had insulation and we would put these insulation panels with metal clips and we basically ah, insulate the mechanical room.

BH: Yeah.

MT: We done that for basically five months before they let us start doing other things. We didn't know anything so that was our way to start to get our feet wet. And in that five months watching the other trades and watching the other iron workers, I started to get a good idea of what construction was all about and what ah, ah building was all about and ah, I-I just took to it like a fish to water. I totally loved it ah, I went to work happy every day. You know, back then it wasn't work, it was, it was fun. You know, I was getting paid to do what I liked to do. I thought that not that many people get to ah live like that. To not only know what they want to do, but to get paid to do it. So, I couldn't be happier. I'm able to take care of my son, bought my first house a year later, so things were looking good.

BH: Yeah. Did you work on any famous downtown buildings or other projects around the city, after that?

MT: Yeah, man, ah let's see ah. My claim to fame, this was a job with Rich Rowe [See interview with Richard "Rich" Rowe]. But I worked on a lot of 300, 300 South Wacker. Beau Heidi ran that job. At that time, that was the tallest brick building in the world. At that time, that's the one they call the "birthday cake" building.

BH: Oh yeah, I know. I just was over there taking photographs last weekend.

MT: Okay. Ah, I worked there, let's see ah, ah, Harold Washington Library.

BH: Oh, you did. Did you work on the owls and stuff? I know 63 did some of the work on some of that stuff.

MT: No. I didn't get to work on that. We worked on the, the curtain wall.

BH: Oh, okay.

MT: Basically, everything that's green and vertical, we done it. We got to the roof, they kind a, farmed it out all over the place.

BH: Yeah. Now did you do a lot of curtain wall in your day too with the iron workers,

or were you . . .

15:58

MT: My first twelve years. I did ah curtain wall and window wall, ah, 175 Harbor Drive is a big punchout building. I did work there ah, I can't think of another one. Ah, AT&T. The top of AT&T, that's probably, I call that my claim to fame building because that's the building, I met Rich Rowe on that building. And, I stayed at that building, it was like 60-70 guys there, and I stayed all the way to the end-till there was like eight guys left. We were there almost two years. I started from the second floor. By the time I got to taking that picture there was nothing about that building I didn't know about. You know, so I went from being a cocky little kid to having confidence. That was, at that job they started saying, you know, this Taylor guy, is foreman material. Ah, Rich Rowe, went to the superintendent. I think it was around the 44th floor, it was the third mechanical room, and he said "look, the guy is doing foreman's work" and I didn't, I didn't care that I was doing somebody's else's job, I didn't see it like that. You know, I didn't, I wasn't one of those that well "this is what I'm suppose to do, I'm not going to do his work." I was willing to do anything and everything. I saw it as experience and also understood that sometime my foreman was grooming me to see how well I can handle the next task. So, I never complained about additional work. I done anything and everything. If the foreman wasn't there to say what the next step was, I would go grab the blueprints, figure it out and go do it. And, Rich Rowe had had enough. He said "damn" and went to Mike Japczyk and said "look the guy is doing foreman work. We need to take care of him." So they gave me journeyman's pay as a second year apprentice and then Rich Rowe became best friends after that. He started giving me projects and he was absolutely, I tell him this all the time, he was absolutely instrumental in the development of my career. Because he would ah, put me in the fire. And say okay, "here's the blueprints, there's the steel, take those two guys and go do it."

BH: Yeah.

MT: And then he'd say okay, first off, this is what I want you to do. Take the blueprints, go over there in the corner for two hours, understand those blueprints, so these guys aren't standing around watching you, understand what you've go to do, then come back get these two guys after break and then you go build it. Then he'd walk away and leave me alone. That took an awful lot of courage and confidence to give me that kind of responsibility. And, ah, I-I was scared to death that I was going to let him down, but I never did, you know. It always worked out. You know, and he saw something in me, I had not yet seen in myself. That ah, I was going to be good at this trade. I just liked it. I didn't know I was going to be good at it. You know ah, and understand it ah, the way that I did. I wanted to, but he knew I had it before I knew I had it. And ah, ah, I've always thanked him for it and he's always given me opportunities that way.

19:04

MT: Ah, when I first, when I took my journeyman test. I was working for a company, I was still doing punchout work, hated it, and then ah, because I wanted to do more curtain wall and eventually get into miscellaneous, but I had had enough of punchout windows.

It was ah, there was no challenge there. You know after 175 Harbor Drive, there was like a 1,000 windows and I worked with two or three other companies that put in punchout windows, and, and storefront windows. You know, that, that's good work, but it, at that time I was growing, it was baby work to me. I wanted a challenge. I wanted something more challenging.

BH: So once you, I mean that's a pretty simple skill once you master it right and then you're just repeating it endlessly and so you were getting bored out of your mind at some point, probably, right?

MT: Yep. My only challenge was ah, speed, to see how fast I could get it done and that ended up raising my stock a little bit too because ah, ah, people would, if I get on a job that was mundane, then I would see how quickly I could get it done and the foreman would say, "man, this guy is really cranking it out" and I wasn't trying to crank it out. This is the way I could stay motivated. So I was turning it out, I was turning the work out awfully fast. My stock was rising. I should say.

BH: Did you, did you feel, I'm you were on the front end of the integration of that union because it was pretty much all white at least probably into the '70s at some point . . .

MT: Yeah, ah

BH: But still you got in at the '80s was there still, I mean you were young too and there might have been some hostility . . . but was race also a factor still with, with some of the older white workers or were they, were they comfortable and they just recognized that you were good at your job and let you do it?

MT: Both.

BH: Both?

MT: There was some ah animosity, you could see it on people's faces. It don't take a rocket scientist to tell what somebody's thinking, but I never felt it personally. I got along with everybody. I was always smiling and laughing and I always, ah, I never got in the old timer's way. I knew how to ah, I knew how to befriend them and I wasn't trying to be manipulative. I was always under their butt asking them questions. If this guy's been on the job 20 years, I'm like a six year old. "What's this? How do you do that?" I'd stop what I'm doing and go over there and say: "how do you make that do that." You know, and these guys would love that you know, this kid is taking an interest in this trade and trying to learn this craft. So they all liked me. I never, I never felt it. They ah, ah, felt that this guy is going to be good for the industry. He respects me enough to ask me my opinion and he is genuinely trying to learn our craft. He's here everyday. He's helpful. I see an old timer moving something, or, or, trying to, I, I would jump in and help people all the time. Ah, all the old timers loved me 'cause I was always carrying their damn tools and stuff all the time. And, I was always up under them, asking them questions, so they always looked at me like I was, I was everybody's pet little student.

BH: Yeah.

22:16

MT: Because I would come around and I wouldn't stand there looking stupid. I could almost always see what they were doing so I would jump in and help and I would always ask questions. So, I never had the racism thing.

BH: Yeah.

MT: Then after people like Rich Rowe, Heidi, Mike Japczyk, and a few other guys. When these guys are mentioning your name, even though people that don't like you have a tendency to say "well damn, if his name is being mentioned by the superstars, we better leave him alone." And then, they started to see, even when I didn't know some things, ah, I outworked everybody. It was difficult not to like me.

BH: Yeah.

MT: You know, so those that didn't like me, I made them like me anyway. I, I never had those problems. I, I really didn't. I felt it with some of the other guys, but nobody really wanted to bother me, because my stock was rising and everybody liked me so, it was the kind thing, where, if somebody had a problem with me, I'm like "damn, this guy, you got a problem with Mike Taqee?" Well it was Taylor then. "You got a problem with Mike Taylor?" "You know, like man, this guy is the most helpful guy on the job." Always here, so, you couldn't say a bad thing about me. I, I didn't make any mistakes in those days. You know ah, ah, other than my ignorance of the job, but I was really everybody's best friend. So, if you said you didn't like me, more than likely, you were the problem.

BH: Yeah. So you, and I'm just, I'm not trying to interrupt you, I'm just trying to follow your chronology a little bit, so you've worked a few years in the trade, ah, did you become a foreman then pretty quickly? I mean, you were, they were talking about that, did you go to that step and did you stay as a foreman on a lot of jobs after that? What?

MT: Actually, I was a foreman on this job, but they couldn't technically make me a foreman because I was still an apprentice. So, I worked for this company . . .

BH: And, that's the AT&T building . . .

MT: AT&T.

BH: OK.

MT: So, I ah, ah, when I got my, I got my journeyman's card in '89 and I quit the company I was going to work for. Work was great at that time. I didn't even have a job, but I quit and went and took a cruise. Me and my wife, she is also a 73 [Local 73] sheet metal worker. We come in at the same time, so . . . We got our books at the same time,

so we decided to take a cruise. I came back and there were three messages on my phone, saying "I heard you quit where you were working, do you want to come work for me?" One of them was Rich Rowe. That was my first job as actual foreman. I went to work for Rich Rowe at 225 West, was it Lake Street? West Wacker, 225 West Wacker. Another great building, that's the one with the big bowl that's sitting there. It's all gray at the top . . .

BH: Right.

MT: and four spires in a big bowl sitting there in the middle. And that was my first "official" foreman job. Even though I technically was doing foreman work ever since AT&T. It was the second year, but I was officially the foreman on that job when I got back from vacation. I went to work for Rich Rowe and Harmon Minneapolis, and ah, it was one of those buildings that they got to the top and then it was a completely different building. Like, like, like 311 Wacker the concrete building?

BH: Yeah.

MT: They got to 77 stories in brick and then all that birthday cake stuff up there is an entirely different building. It's all curtain wall and panels. It's just completely different, and ah, ah, a radiuses and circles and stuff. Two absolutely completely different buildings. Ah, not to jump around too much, but that building, when we got to 77, the people that were running the job, got confused about what to do up there . . .

BH: Is this the birthday cake building?

MT: Yeah, so they brung in Rich Rowe's apprentice, the great Beau Heidi, who was also trained under Rich Rowe, to take it over from 77 to top and close this thing out. This, I don't want to mention the company's name, they're gone anyway, but they couldn't handle it from 77 up. So they brung in the superstar, Beau Heidi. Beau Heidi brung his crew in. He called me up, Salcetti, a few other guys, and we went in there and we kicked ass and we, and we, and we brought that job in. The same thing happened with Rich Rowe. When I first became a foreman, it was the one company that built the building, I think that it was to 26-27 and then it was a completely different building up there again. Everything was all panels and, and, it was really cool, that's why I'm getting kind of excited about it . . . And ah, each four corners had, I remember 177 different pieces on each corner. So, it was a completely different building once you got to 26. He brought me in to run that job up there.

MT: Again, I was petrified. People are mad, some of the guys were mad. One guy, I remember somebody telling me to my face, "I've been on this job for six damn months, and here you come in, you're going to be a foreman of this here top, who in the hell do you think you are?" So, I had a hard time on that job for about three weeks. That was the most heat that I have ever felt coming into a job as foreman and there's already a crew in place that's been here and these guys think "look we can handle this, we've done it so far", Rich Rowe said "No, Mike's my man and he's going to run those spires up

there.” And, then he done the same thing, he said look “take the blueprints, go over there on that top spire and you sit down for a couple of hours, and you get an understanding on how this thing’s going.” And, I’m saying to myself, I’m looking at the drawing, and there had to be 50 sheets right . . .

BH: Oh my God.

MT: “How am I going to understand this in 2-3 hours, right?” And he say, “then you come down and you pick the guys you want.” I’m like oh man, damn Rich, you know how am I going to pull this off right? Once again, he saw something in me, I didn’t know I had. So, I sat up there for a few hours and it clicked. I knew how all the pieces had to go together, so I went down into the yard and started looking at the pieces, looking up in the corner and I got it. I knew, how, I knew how to attack it. I still didn’t know how it was going to close out, but I knew how to start this thing and how to attack it. Besides, Rich is here. I’m not going to, if I get screwed up, I just go get him. But, I don’t want to go get him. He’s got all this confidence in me, right. He want to see me pull it off. He already know what my career is going to. And ah, from that point on, I was a foreman on every job I had ever been on. Even when I tried not to be a foreman, I got tired of it . . . Because you can’t always choose your guys, so I would, you know, to hell with this. I’m just going to be a regular guy. I don’t want to be a foreman. Nah, no companies go no, you’re going to be a foreman anyway. I’ll tell you what “if you don’t what the foreman’s pay, you’re going to do this detail anyway. If you don’t want to, then go work for some place else.”

BH: Wow.

MT: So I had no choice, so they pretty much . . . This was and that became my reputation around the trade. That ah, I was a foreman. And whatever job I went on that’s what I did.

29:01

BH: I have a question for you because you said that you were interesting in architecture, when you were a kid. When you’re building a building like ah, the birthday cake, you know the architect obviously designs that and it’s really kind of an abstraction. I mean they think it through it in their head and they know from experience how it’s supposed to come together, but once that whole thing starts, you guys seem to be the guys that kind of put it together. Does the architect really come out much, because, I know that sometimes parts don’t fit together right, even though the architect thinks that they are supposed to so, um, how does that work? I mean you guys just kind of plow ahead with the blueprints yourself, um?

MT: Great question, great question. What usually happens, and I always tell people, and ah, ah, I didn’t get this complete understanding until later, ah, especially after, right before I became owner, I, I completely understood everybody’s position . . . The architect don’t give a flying fig about how the building is built. He’s scared about his design. He don’t care about the bolts, the nuts, none of that. A good architect will get

into some of the engineering . . . You know, like a Helmut Kahn and guys like that. They'll get into the engineering of the building. Most architects won't. They just draw it up as a design and that's all they'll see. They don't care what's behind that pretty façade. The engineer, on the other hand, he don't care, he don't give a flying fig what the building look like, he just don't want it to fall down.

MT: So, excuse me, you end up with these two cultures clashing a lot. And, just like you said, and that happened on that building, you just get to the point and realize hey, nobody accounted for how you're going to marry the last corner, if it's behind a wall already. So now, you going to close off this box, how do you close it off. You don't go to the architect with that, he really don't care. And he don't, most of the time, he don't know. You have to go to the engineer and get a change order. Back then, you just went to the general contractor and say, "look, this is not going to fit, we're going to add an angle here, move this bar around here and this is how we're going to close it off. That's that. Sign off on it." Now you got to go through a whole bunch of logistics and red tape. You the engineers, have a meeting and the architect engineer sits down and then a guy like me comes in and say "this is not going to work." They look at me like I'm stupid, that this guy is this big time architect with all these letters behind his name, and this guy is this superstar engineer, who went to IIT and I'm just this dumb ironworker.

But I've been doing it for 26 years. So in the end, they end up listening to me anyway. But to go back to what you were saying, that's usually what happens on a, on a, a structure. Is that the architect and engineer, they don't interface and they got different perspectives on a, on a, how the job is going end up being, end up being completed. And most of the time, it is on us to come up with designs and ah, ah, a fixes, if you will. And most of the time, we, we, over manufacture it. If it calls for a 3/8 angle here that's 1x2, we'll put a half inch angle there 2x4. Anything to make a engineer shut up. You know so if you have to alter something and, and if it fails, now we're liable. So, we alter something the engine, that's down on paper, that's been approved, then we always go up in grade that way we can say "we gave you more than what your specs called for and now we're not liable." So we go through that a lot.

32:39

BH: Oh. So now this raises another question, because I have interviewed a lot of guys and especially, the older iron workers, a lot of them quit school in 7th or 8th grade and had a lot of problems in school and were, now they would say they had a learning disability or something, but it strikes me that when I'm talking to most of them, regardless of how much education they've had, they're pretty smart.

MT: Yeah.

BH: You know, and they're good problem solvers. I mean that's, would you say that's the case, certainly when you're getting to where like you and Rich, at that level. You guys gotta be able to problem solve, right?

MT: That is the most important thing. It's, it's ironic that you should bring that phrase

up, because when I understood the duties of a foreman, the thing that I understood most, is, is that you got to not only get along with people, you're not, you're only as good as your crew, so you got to be able to be diplomatic and get along with people, but the most important thing, the best attribute a foreman can have is the ability to solve problems. You can't solve problems, you're in trouble, then you just as, you might as well just be another man on the line. But that is absolutely the key to construction period. To solve the problems, that's what foreman's do. Any monkey can build it, it's when you run into a problem then they're cornered, now what happens. And, and, as Beau Heidi will say, three men will do the same job, three different ways. So, you got to not only fix it, in a, in a way that the client is going to like it, cause you're, cause you're going to charge him for all that extra work, but you also got to fix it in a way that the architect doesn't fuss and the engineer doesn't squawk. So you can to please all these people at the time. So to be a good problem solver, you end up with the engineer liking you, the architect liking you and the client likes you. And that's the essence of being a good foreman. Once you got that, ah, the next step is general foreman and that's what happened to me. Once I understood it, I started putting people in place and let them do the work. When you got a problem, then call me. Other than that, don't call me. I'm going to go to that corner and start ordering that material and looking over here. I'm looking for problems now. And I leave my crew to do the work.

34:50

BH: When you move from foreman, to general foreman, what's the increased responsibility that you take on? I mean, when you're a foreman, you're working on a section or something . . .

MT: Yeah, we kind of have a detail, it could be two guys, could be five guys. When you're general foreman, you could have this entire floor. It could be two or three different crews. General foreman, I may have this wall, that wall, this stair, over here, I could have three or four . . .

BH: different tasks, guys who are doing the stairs, the curtain wall, or whatever, . . .

MT: Yeah.

BH: and you're watching all of them at once . . .

MT: Yeah. The general foreman's basically the superintendent's eyes and ears. He kinda is everywhere. If the job is really big, it could be several general foremens on the job. And, ah, one general foreman can have from one thru fifteen to the first (?) going, another one takes over from there, depends on the construction, the nature of the job and what the superintendent wants to do.

BH: Yeah. Now when you're working on a building and you're supervising like the stairs or the windows or multiple things as a general foreman, what about when you've got guys in there from the glazers or the laborers union, how does, do they have to have their own foreman, or do you have, do you have the right to supervise guys from other

unions or do jurisdictional disputes come into play?

MT: All the time. Um, we do a thing called “working composite.” A lot of times, if there are louvers, you’ve heard about the louvers . . .

BH: Yeah.

MT: We end up working with sheet metal workers a lot.

BH: Okay.

MT: And it depends on, now days, it depends on who has the contract. If the sheet metal workers have the contract, then they’ll hire an ironworker or two just to shut us up. If ah, we have the contract, we’ll hire a sheet metal worker or two just to shut them up. And who, whosever the superintendent on the job then that’s who the foreman is, whether it’s sheet metal workers or iron workers. So if sheet metal workers are working under me then . . .

BH: Does the, does the general contractor decide who, whether it’s going to be iron workers or . . .

MT: No. It’s already decided in the contract.

BH: The original contract?

MT: Yeah, the original contract. So ah, yeah, but that still will come up as a dispute. Let’s say all these mechanical louvers have been awarded to the iron workers, it’s in the contract, the general contractor will say, that’s ironworker’s work. The sheet metal workers can walk up and challenge that and say “look, you iron workers have stationary louvers, mechanical louvers are ours. So now, the general will throw his hands up and say look it’s what the contract . . . you guys fight it out. So we end up going to arbitration, but to keep from doing that because the job is going on, we just hire two of their guys and walk away.

BH: Just to keep it simple . . .

MT: Yep.

BH: To get the job done?

MT: Yeah, and that way we ah, and those type of disputes come up all of the time, and we and if you fight and litigate over every little thing . . . yeah, cause they’ll end up, ah, and they’re not dumb, by the time you get through litigation and even if you win, it’s too late. The job’s built now. So, and all they, what they really want, I’ll tell you what they already got, to put two of them, that’s what they really want.

BH: Yeah. Just a couple of more guys on the job?

MT: Yeah. Because if they really want to really try to fight that take it to court and all that stuff, the building will be, the building will be done by the time you get through with all that so what's the point in fighting?

BH: Yeah. Do you ah, were you pretty happy with overall Local 63 as a union? Do you think it's a good union?

MT: Yep. Yeah, I was ecstatic. That's well, ah, I come in in the class of '85 and it was great people in that class, Paul Thompson, John Salcetti, Larry McNiff, these were heavy, these guys, these guys are business agents now. These guys were heavyweights. So, I come in a great class of guys that wanted to master the trade so we challenged each other. There was a healthy competition in my, in my class. We got along well, most of the time, you know, I mean we'd argue and stuff, but ah, everybody was always out to be, out to be the best, ah, ah, and we just challenged each other at every turn . . . And most of us were genuinely, just wanted to be there. Just to be a part of Local 63. We were really ecstatic about that, but it was a great class that came in. And, ah, it shows, in the a hierarchy of Local 63 now. Half my classmates are officers . . . You know, so I came in at ah, ah a really good time. And all the heavyweights were still around at the time, ah, ah, Roy Williams[See interview with Roy Williams] , Rich Rowe was still out in the field. Beau Heidi still doing his thing ah, ah, Eric Dean was still in the field. You know all these guys that are in the International now, I worked with those guys, you know, and ah, it was a great time and the work was booming. You could pretty much go wherever you wanted to go. So if you had good stock, you could move around. And I did, I moved around a lot. I worked on the jobs, I wanted to work on and I thought that was the coolest thing in the world. How many places you can go to and "say, you know what I don't like it here. I want to go work over here?"

BH: Yeah.

MT: Man that's some cool shit. How many people get to do that. Yeah, those, those were great times. It wasn't work. I swear it was fun. It, it was fun. I couldn't wait to get to work. You'd go to Sears to buy tools or you'd do a job, and you'd get in there, man I don't have the right tools to go do this and you'd think of something, I know what I need. You'd get off that day, run to Sears and go buy that tool. That's how we approached the trade back then. And if you, if you couldn't buy the tool, you'd get some steel and take a tool and modify it or make tools and now that was in your tool case forever. And, that was ah, that type of skill, I think is lost. You know, we would invent ways to get the job done. You know you would get kudos for that if you can, if you're doing curtain wall and it's just one screw behind that nobody can ever get, if you invent the tool that everybody's gonna use for the next sixty floors, hey . . . you the man on this job.

40:58

BH: I can imagine, yeah. So how did you move from ah being you know ironworker foreman on ironworker jobs, to becoming a contractor of your own? What made you

make that jump? I mean that's a big jump and, I know the ironworker trade, it seems like a lot of guys end up doing that, not everyone, obviously wants to but you did it, what, what made you do that? What prompted you to move to that level and how long did you do that?

MT: Okay. I was foreman for a long time. Then I got tired of curtain wall, cuz I'd done it for 12 years with Beau Heidi and I loved Beau, but I wanted to do something different. I felt I'd mastered curtain wall. You know every job is different. I wanted to be a well rounded ironworker. I wanted to walk some steel. I wanted to do some miscellaneous. So I went to work for a company called Benzel Industries, Bob Darnell was my last ah, the last boss I worked for. Great guy, and ah, we done nothing but miscellaneous. A lot of stainless, a lot of CTA stations, all the stainless railings you see the CTA stations, stainless kiosks, stainless benches, the little, ah, all that kind of stuff, ah, we did, ah. One of the best jobs, I done with Bob Darnell, we done all of the railings and all the glass work around the U-505 sub. [U-505 was a German submarine at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.] They took it out of the yard and put it in a hole. All the stairs and everything all around it, is my job. Our, our work, I should say. I was the foreman on that job. So we're doing a lot of specialty stuff. Ah, we had a lot of ah, I call them front stairs, out in the suburbs. You know ah, the stairs you see downtown, you walk in the lobby and there's two big giant curved stairs. Yeah we got a lot those and we got a lot of the back stairs, that you know the garage stairs and stuff. But it was something different all the time. You were always working with torches and ah, welding a lot instead of lightweight aluminum. So I wanted to master that, so I got into miscellaneous, I stayed in that for ten years. And ah, then I realized that after ten years that ah, how should I put this, without sounding egotistical, um, I was the authority and it just seemed that it, it had reached a point that there was nothing else for me to do. I was working for Bob and he wouldn't even come out on the job. He, when he sent out payroll checks, he'd send out the next set of drawings, this big, tell me the address of the job, you're still to be delivered when, pick whoever you want, get somebody from the hall [union hall] so I realized then, that I was actually a superintendent.

MT: You know, but we were a small outfit. We had four or five trucks on the on the road, but I ran all my own work. So I was functioning as a superintendent and I realized when I looked around the room that I was the authority in the room, the ah, I started winning those arguments with architects and engineers. And it got to the point where, I never lost. After they get initial thing, what is this dumb black guy going to come in here and start telling me what to do. But after I explain what the problem is, and how we can solve it, now engineers are calling me, Mr. Taquee. Well, how do you guys normally do it, Mr. Taquee? I won. You know, so I started to realize I became the authority in the room and the only thing left for me to do is have my name on the front of the check. That was the only thing I wasn't doing. I didn't function any differently when I started my company than I did when I worked for Bob. He pretty much gave me free reign, gave me the credit card, order what you want, ah, ah, my own truck. Do whatever you want to do, just run the job. So, basically I functioned that way, but I didn't try to, I didn't try to be that, it just, it was a natural progression. If, if anything, Rich Rowe pushed me into that. He made me my first foreman, he gave foreman's pay on this job, made me my first

foreman at 225 and ah, what else, actually, I left Benzel Industries. I was going to go into business. There is a story in between there. I was working on this last job here, at 56th and Maryland, I think it is here, and was doing the stairs. We were out at O'Hare and saw Rich and I said, "Rich, I'm going into business next year." He said, "I'll back you. I think you're ready for it." I'll build this one last stair, because it was over in Hyde Park, it's in my neighborhood. "I'm going to go build this last stair for Bob and then I'm gone." He said, "Okay. I'll get behind you. I'll, I'll going to guide you. I'll, I'll help you out." Well, ah, I'm working on this stair here. I couldn't get along with the superintendent, because it's a open set of stairs. And, I love stairs. You can build stairs, now again, you become God. Everybody can't build stairs. Stairs are a building all within itself. You're building it three dimensions, so it's challenging. This guy wanted me to wear a safety line, two. One going up and one going down the stairs. It was the most dangerous thing in the world, you know. Carrying this tail behind you . . . Working up an eight foot stair, you know, I mean, I understand, you can fall into the hole, there's no rails, I can understand it, but if I got tools and two or three landings, and walking around doing things, man I was tripping all over the place with that thing. So, routinely I was sneak and take it off. So I could run up the stairs, and go get tools, and run up here and drop them off. Go back down and hook it back up. He got tired of catching me and he run me off the job.

BH: Ha, ha.

MT: He said, "I've had enough of you. Get off, you're off this job." So, ah, ah, ah, Beau was, had come, by that time he is working for Benzel now. But, he had enough of the curtain wall thing, now, he's working there. So Beau, I called up Beau and said "Beau, I just got run off." He said, "Well, you can come on out here with us at the airport." I said, "oh". I really didn't want to work at the airport anymore. I kind of gave that job to another foreman. I just got tired of hearing it. We were out there for four years. I just had enough, so that, that's how, they would just to keep me happy, they gave me this job over here in Hyde Park. But when I got run off and they wanted me to come back, I said, "Beau, I think I'm gonna go into business." I don't think he believed me when I first told him that. But he do know, that I was talking about it and planning it and I had already spoke to Rich about it a year before I was working at the airport. So, I just saw it as the opportunity to do it. It, it just happened that way. I got run off that job, I don't want to go to O'Hare, now's as good a time as any, so that's how I went into business. The year was 2008. And, look what happened. I come out of the door, it was September of 2008, gung ho, I'm legal and I got everything. I even got contracts waiting for me. I got people lining up to work for me, and October of 2008, the economy collapsed. So, what, hey, I'm out of the door now, I can't go back. It's like moving out of your parent's home. You can't go back now. I got insurance, I got a bond, I got a truck, you know what I mean? I these got contracts, I can't go back. I wanted to, but it was too late. So, ah, I made the best of it. And, we did, we did pretty well. I didn't lose my ass. I didn't make a lot of money. But, I didn't lose. For those four years, I done good work. My stock was rising. People are still calling me today, even though I told them, December 2011 was my last day. I've been retired from the academy for a year. I'm done.

MT: You know. So, ah, ah, my stock was rising. I did good work. I done a lot of CTA work and, and, ah, Metra, I worked with ah, IHC Construction a lot, and, Bridgeport Steel was probably my benefactor. I'd say they pretty much kept me in business. And, we got a, maybe 20-30 public schools. That was the lion share of the work. Because when the economy collapsed, the jobs like this, curtain wall jobs, window wall jobs, they kinda' stuck. It was hard for me to get. I was competing with the big boys all the time. Now, they want this little stuff. So, ah, ah, banks, and, and, new police stations, fire stations, actually, we're the one that ah, ah, I'm going to be working there shortly. Engine 16's house on 39th and Pershing. Ah, and, I just couldn't get that kind of work. The big boys were scarfing it up. The CPS [Chicago Public Schools] had to have, they had to have minority participation. They were pretty much handing me the jobs whenever I wanted. So that was, that's mostly how we stayed in business. Ah, Metra Rail, and ah, Chicago Public Schools.

BH: Yeah.

49:40

MT: I done that for four years until the fire department called and I ah, they put thirteen years on the table, back pay. That lawsuit went through and it was like this, you got to give **me (?)**. Because I was, I was fighting at that time. I was staying in business, but I was working 14-15 hours a day ah, I was making decent money, but I was struggling to pay the bills. I had a 100 grand sitting out here, but I owed 30, so now I got to sit here, twiddle my thumbs. I didn't have a lot of money. [Lots of background noise, hard to hear] So then, a guy called, I want you to do this job, I can't take that job because, I mean, I need this money for this guy to give me so, it was, it was always one or the other. And then, when I got the money, they paid my bills, now . . . [noise, something fell in the bar] . . . paying insurance waiting for a job to come up. There was always a gap there. You know what I mean, ah, I was just always a gap . . .

BH: Oh yeah.

MT: I never quite had enough to go to the next level. And I was, I was ready to graduate to the next level. So, I went to my bank and I said, "Look, my problem is cash flow. I can do the job, I got clients lining up to work with me. They want me to take these half million to million dollar jobs, the thing is I can't, I can't meet payroll. I'm gonna run out of money in a month or two, unless people start paying me in a timely manner." But the bank rejected my loan. They said, "You haven't been in business long enough. We'll give you a personal loan against your property, but when you're Taquee architecture, we ain't givin' you nothin'." I don't want to leverage my house. So I just kept staying small potatoes and I struggled as just a small contractor ah, trying to get, ah, companies to front me. Like IHC Construction said, "We want you to take this job, this work, \$800,000." "Okay, fine, you give me \$200,000 up front, I'll take that job." You know, but those, those never panned out. So they'd cut me little pieces of the pie and, and stuff like that.

BH: So they . . .

MT: They wanted me to get bigger. I fought it tooth and nail. They wanted me to take, they said if we do that, then we're going to bond you at, at

BH: Yeah, really pushed you . . .

MT: And really put you on, at no, no, no. What's the purpose of going into business, if they're going to own you. I might as well be on your pay roll, I don't want to, I don't want you to own me.

BH: Yeah, exactly. So, how did you decide to do the fire department? Did you go to the academy?

MT: Yeah, in '09.

BH: Did you have to take an exam then and did you still have your contracting business?

MT: Yeah. As a matter of fact, we took, how did that go . . . I got the letter in the mail, I think it was like August or June, I'm like, fire department, wow. And then I read the logistics of the lawsuit and I'm like, are you kidding me, thirteen years, they're going to give back that many. That means I'm only going to have to give them seven and I can walk. I'm like, why not? I'll bite. Construction is tight. Firefighters don't work that much and I could probably do both. This is my mindset at the time, right? And, it ain't like I had a lot of work, I had enough work, my bills are being paid and so forth. So hey, I can double dip. And I had firefighters work for me before too, so I know they can double dip all of the time. I say, "What the hell. What have I got to lose? I'm the owner, I can stop down anytime I want to."

BH: Right.

MT: I'm not going to, I'm not losing anything. And so, I sent the card back in and, ah, I went down to the appointment that first day. And, then they had us jump into a series of hoops all the way through ah, ah, urine tests, hair tests, I mean, you name it. And then they, drawing blood, they done, I mean they done everything before they finally made that final selection. That we were actually going to be in. So, I jumped through all those hoops and ah, actually, ah, ah, I almost did not make it. I, ah, sent the card in, and in October, me and my wife took a cruise to Bermuda. And when we came back, we were still working on Metra Rail on 87th and Lyons. When I came there was the card in the mail from the fire department and they said, "Okay, you passed the first wave. You go on to the second wave now. You got to come in here with a doctor's appointment Tuesday morning." And, I said, "how am I going to pull this off?" I just got back into town, ah, Sunday, from a trip. You know now we been on a cruise trip, on an island of, of ah, Bermuda, so I get back on Sunday. I got one day to go get a doctor's statement to say I'm fit to be a firefighter. Then show up down at the [?] Tuesday morning. I said, "How in the hell . . ." It's, it's Sunday at about 5:00 and I'm realizing I got tomorrow.

Had that date been for Monday morning, I wouldn't be a firefighter today, I'd still be in an iron worker.

BH: Wow.

MT: I had all of one day and I, I called all around. I managed to find a clinic that would give me a physical and ah, ah, clean bill of health the same day that I walked in. So, and that's how, I walked into Quinn [Quinn Academy of the Chicago Fire Academy] that Tuesday, with that physical and I kept going down that process.

BH: Wow.

MT: But I just, I made it by one day. I mean, had I been in town, no problem. But, I come back being out of town. This card had been there a week. I didn't know it. Cause I'm out of town. I said God must have wanted me to do this, cause, had this been Monday morning, that's it. There is no way I could have pulled it off. But it was Tuesday morning, and it gave me one day and I managed to get in there and get that done. And, I kept going through each step and each step and each step until eventually they said, you're selected, you're going to be one of the 111 that's going to be coming in. At that time, by that time, I worked by last job, I mean my last day was December 17th with Metra Rail. We pretty much shut down for the winter. And, ah, another job or two came up, but I didn't want to take them, because I realized that I think this thing is going to happen for me. Around February, and another job through from IHC, I turned it down. And, I had another one, one the books that was going to start in April, and I asked them can back out of it. And, I had another one, another one with Cab Works out at the airport, that was going to be the start of something huge. That was a good relationship that I had going with them and they ton of work and my stock was growing. So once I got out at the airport and got under that wing, I was going to spread like wildfire. So, I was going to start looking good. But I walked away because I wanted this.

56:09

MT: So, Um, after jumping through all the hoops, getting in, I called my insurance company. Cancelled my insurance and just shut my company down. I came into the academy March 16th and ah, made it all the way through. I hung in there with the 38 year olds. And, ah, they didn't rough me up too much. It was difficult. One of the hardest things I've ever done, but I wanted it bad, made it happen. Ah, ironically, one of the things that happened, at the Quinn, is there was a set of stairs there, that they make us run up to the roof and down all of the time. This is one of the ways of punishing us. Making us do, what we call "up and over". So, if don't act right or we ain't got our stuff together, up and over. And, we go do ten of them or whatever . . . ironically, I bid those stairs through IHC Construction. So, every time I run up them, I would laugh like look at me . . . I didn't get that contract though. I go, wouldn't it have been ironic if I had put those stairs up, then I got to run up and down the damn things all the time.

BH: [Laughter] Yeah, that's funny.

MT: So I always thought that, that used to keep me going when I was ready to get really ah, ah, lose it or ah, physically I just couldn't go on anymore. I used to think about that story about, these are actually your stairs. Like you own these stairs . . . right, and I would get the motivation and ah, and, and keep on going.

BH: So how long is that training in the academy? Because you just started right working on the force? Right?

MT: Yeah. It's normally about six months, six to seven months. It all depends on how well the candidates understand the curriculum and everybody come up. They truly try to get everybody out at the same time. We were about 20 of us, that just couldn't get out of there. So they had to re-take the test. We do some training, stuff like that. And in the end, they end up decided that, "Hey look, you guys are just going to stay back, we gotta let these guys graduate." So we graduated November 1st. Twenty of my classmates are coming out in January and I think we're going to lose three. So, on the EMS side, we lost one, and when we got over to the fireside, we lost three more. That's not bad out of 111. And where we were basically the geriatric, where everybody in there was in their late 30's. Six of us were in our 50's, me included. So ah, that was, that was pretty cool that we all made it. That was a hell of training. We done, oh I don't know, several hundred pushups a day, thousands of jumping jacks. We would run five miles then got to sit in a classroom, wait for two hours, then they just wore out butts out. That was really, really tough. If, if I hadn't been an iron worker for 26 years, I couldn't have pulled it off. No, no, I would have been one of those guys that was, would have been dragging behind a lot. But I was right up there in front with the kids, you know what I mean, we all struggled, we were all . . . but for a 52 year old, I hung right in there with skinniest, sharpest, youngest guys in the class. I was right in there.

BH: Yeah, that's great.

59:10

MT: And, when we came, when we graduated in November, the phone started ringing, okay, when you coming out, this is Bridgeport Steel. Okay, we ready for you. We got a ton of contracts over here and I realized, I was just going to be beating myself up. I can do it, but I don't think that I want to. I gave iron work 26 years of my life. There's no, there's no, I can't go any higher. The only thing I can do is make a lot of money. There's nothing I can learn and I didn't think that I would give it my all, because I was never motivated by money. I was never rich or nothing, but I always had everything that I needed. They handed me everything I wanted. So, if, if my only motivation was to make a lot of money, that's not a good enough excuse to go back. And, I don't want to do both for the simple reason, is that I really want to master the fire department. I'm not looking to be a lieutenant, but I really want to learn the lieutenant's job. I want master it, I don't want to, I got an engine and a truck at my house and I want to know everything each one of those apparatuses do. What the engineer do. What the lieutenants do. I want to know everything about it and I can't do both. So, I want to stick with this until I master it.

So I called union hall, "say listen, I don't think I want to come back. How many credits

to I have? What do I have to do? How long do I have to go before I can qualify for a pension?" Mickey said, this was like ah, the 8th of November, or whatever, I had just started my first day. You know it was the day after my first shift. And she said, "Mike, you know you're going to be 52 in a few weeks." I said, "Yeah." She said, "you know you actually qualify for your birthday on the 1st of December?" I said, "Get the hell out of here. I graduate on the 1st of November and you're telling me I can actually get my pension on the 1st of December or January? Does it start in January?" She said, "I'll tell you what, if have that paperwork back to me before the 15th, I'll have a check in your house, on your birthday." And that brings us up to pretty much where we are now.

1:01:15

BH: Yeah. Well let me: I've got one more question that I want to ask you and then we can over and do something with the photos. Um, the labor movements been taking a real beating lately, um, public workers, private sector unions, Chicago has always been a pretty good union town. I mean, I didn't grow up here, but my family was from here and they're all in different unions, boiler makers, bricklayers, city workers. . . What do you, what do you think the current state of the unions is in, I mean, is it dying or is it just got to reinvent itself? Why is there so much hostility? I mean, what are your, just, tell me your thoughts on that.

MT: Good question . . .

BH: I mean obviously, you're not anti-union. You were in the iron workers, you're going to be in the fireman's union. Um . . .

MT: Yeah, definitely both union. Ah, I don't think the unions are a dying. I think somebody's ah, sticking a knife in them. I think they are going to die or go away, and I think that a current plan [Paying the bill and Taquee insists on paying for lunch. Laughter.]

I think the union's are in a bad way because the political climate is painting, it seems like, and this is across the country, not just Chicago, that they're painting all public workers as moochers. And, and, they are trying to figure out a way to balance their budgets. I think America's in this, they got this fiscal cliff thing and they're going through this budget where they are trying to balance their books on the backs of ah, they're trying to balance their books and ah, they got a lot of pensions, pensioners, ah, how should I put this. In the '50s, the pensions didn't have any problems because there wasn't that many people collecting pensions. Everybody was working, we're booming and so forth, but now people are living longer, the people are living longer, so you got a lot of people on pensions and they don't know how to continue to ah, to fund the pensions. Especially after they raped most of them. And, they won't give them back. They don't tell you that, they just say the pensions are under funded. Yes, but they were over funded a decade ago. You borrowed from them and never gave the money back. And they're not saying that. But to ah, to ah, bring us up to where we are now, I think that ah, ah, the only way that ah, a city, county, state and federal government, to balance their books, they're going to have to figure out how to get all these retirees off the books. I mean it's a lot of people and the baby boomers are continuing to retire, how do you continue to give these people,

keep these people on a fixed income, when you don't have any money yourself? So, I think they are scapegoating the unions, because that's a lot of money they got to kick in. But these people ah, you know ah, ah, paid union dues and they put into their pensions over the years, this money is owed them, just like social security. Then they don't to pay that either. They don't have a way from the city on up to balance their books. So, I think this is reason why they are going after the unions is because ah, that's ah, that's a hefty, that's a hefty amount you're going to have to pay for the rest of these people's lives. And, and, that notion of building casinos in order to balance your books, that's just not going to work. Ain't nobody go no money now, so that casino revenue, it's dried up. So do you balance the books now? You got to go out after civil workers, teachers, firemen, policemen, because these people are collecting a pension and you need to find a way to separate that pension from these people. Or, get people, if you can't do that, then what we have to do going forward, I think this is their philosophy, is start hiring people we don't have to give a pension to. So that's the "right to work" thing coming into play now. They don't want to pay these pensions. Forty years ago, Ford Motor Company had no problem paying this obligation to its retirees, but now that's got to be what 15 or 20% of their ah, revenue, annual revenue, is to ah, go into pensions? And they're trying to figure out how to get out of it. So, I think that's the problem pensions are having is that the, ah, big boys at the top don't want to pay that anymore. And, that's only gonna get worse. A lot of people are retiring, all the baby boomers, so that's a, that's a problem the pensions going to have, not of their own fault, but that's just a systemic problem that's going to, ah, ah, happen in this society for decades to come. It's just going to be a hard way back for pensions, I mean for a union workers, America period. She's not getting those manufacturing jobs back from China, I don't care how much they talk. You're just not going to get that back. And you're not going to compete with China. They have a billion people. You can get someone to work for a quarter an hour. We're going to have to figure out how to make some other things that nobody else is making, like we did in, you know, at the turn of the last century, the previous century, I mean. And just, make things, or do things nobody else is doing. And do it better than anybody else, but in this global economy, you can't compete with the ah, China and India. So ah, ah, I think America's going to have to go through her version of austerity. They don't want to use that word, but that's what this fiscal cliff stuff is all about. There is nothing more than austerity and they going to continue to go after unions as much as they can. I believe, and ah, I don't know what's going to come with that, you know, but ah, this, this is not going to be pretty. This is not going to be pretty.

1:07:30

BH: Well, is there anything else you want to comment on and the history of your career? Or anything you want to mention, otherwise, I've asked my, we can go over and do those photos.

MT: Actually, one other thing.

BH: Yeah.

MT: Navy Pier, probably the last great union job we had. This is one of my favorite

pictures. Paul Thompson, he is now a business agent, and we took that picture with Mayor Daley and every time I go by Navy Pier, I think of that. And as far as big union job goes, that's got to be the last really big one we ever been on. I don't know if we're going to get big jobs like that again, I don't know if the city is even trying to move in that direction. Rahm Emmanuel is trying to turn us into a right to work city. He is going to have a hard time doing it, but he's got a lot of clout. And, unions are under the gun. Nobody wants to pay us what we're worth, so it's going to be really tough to see Chicago do things like that again. They ah, I think it's going to be awhile. Had we got the Olympics, things would have changed . . .

BH: Okay, yeah. Well, I'll ask you this question then, it's a big question, you know I study a lot of history, and during the depression, and, we built a lot of big buildings and big dams and even before that and you look around the city of Chicago there's beautiful buildings, post offices, city buildings, and you can go to small towns and you see the coolest big buildings. I mean you know, and you like architecture, the coolest piece of architecture in most towns with less than 5,000 or 10,000 people is the post office or maybe the gym. You know these are like big public works projects. I sometimes, I'm wondering if we're at a point where the country has a failure of will to think big anymore. I mean it's like they are so busy fighting, it can't, the country can't even think big about anything, as big even as the Navy Pier job. Do you think that there's a little of that going on in the US?

MT: Hell yeah. There's a lot of that going on and a lot of that has to do with um, the big corporations. If they don't, if they don't see mass profit in it, then it's going to be hard to get the government to get up those dollars. The democrats are always big on stuff like infrastructure, which we need a lot of now. We're talking hundreds of billions of dollars; you can't get a bill like that passed through this Republican house. Because infrastructure's going to take everybody to chip in some money . . . some of the big wigs, the government. You know, but everybody uses the infrastructure. The rich people can't get rich without the post office and the roads and the fire department and so forth . . .

BH: I'm right there with ya.

MT: You know at some point, you Wall Street guys who got all your money back, should kick in some money for a change and help America much the way they did in ah, during the Great Depression. They invested a lot of money in this country and ah, ah, built the road system. Everybody went back to work and I think they need to do that again. But in order to do that, you're, the debt ceiling's going to skyrocket, so it's six of one, half a dozen of the other. But, I don't think you can get out of it by penny pinching, you know if we don't invest in infrastructure, then it, the bridges are just going to continue to deteriorate. And, the Eastern seaboard has the oldest piping system in the country, they got, every time you look up a main burst somewhere in Maryland and ah, ah New York, it causes all kinds of problems. That's going to happen to the Midwest soon enough. You know, it's just that, if you don't do it, you're going to end up spending the money anyway. So, I, I don't understand what holding the money back is going to

do. You owe, what is it, 16 trillion, what's a few more trillion? I mean, I don't get it. America has always been in debt. I don't see why the amount makes a difference today, than it did a few years ago. I, I, don't think she's in no position to pay back 16 trillion dollars, it just isn't going to happen. She'll go to war with China before she gives China 16 trillion. So if you build an infrastructure again, you can get people back to work and now you got tax revenue. See to me, you, it's like, you ah, it's like you're cutting off your left hand in spite of your right hand. We don't want to spend for infrastructure, but we need to raise revenue, on who? A lot of people don't have jobs, so if you don't have the jobs, you can't raise the revenue, the government can't spend the money. I mean it goes back and forth. And, ah, you can't get the economy together because people don't have money to spend. I mean exactly, what are you going to do, so, you gave the banks all our money, and you gave Wall Street back their money, and now we're sitting here with depressed homes, some of us don't have any jobs, and you're saying pull yourself up by the bootstraps. Oh, and by the way, we're going to cut your pension and we're thinking about not giving you social security. That can't possibly be healthy for middle class people. And without the middle class, I think this country's going to go into another recession. You know but ah, they're not going to have the middle class again. If you look at what's on the table, I think Barack Obama walked this position back twice as, as it relates to ah, ah entitlements. He has lowered the amount he wants to raise in a way of revenue. Boehner hasn't moved an inch yet, you know, and we still do not know the logistics of that bill. There were those discretionary cuts, we never actually know what's in them, until we look up in April and go, hey they say you were going to this.

So, I think that ah, austerity is coming. I know I sound pessimistic, but I really think America's going to take a hit. I think our cost of living is going down a little bit. What Europe is going through, we're going to go through a mild version of that. It's just that America's bigger, stronger, more, she has more money, more wherewithal. She can, she can weather some of that. So instead of taking a 20% hit like Greece, we're going to take 3% here, 4% there. But, but we're going to get hit. There's no way that we can continue to live like we did before 2008, the day of ample credit and ah, ah, everybody had everything, buy all the toys you want in the world. Those days are over, you know, for the foreseeable future.

BH: Well hey, it's really been a pleasure Michael.

MT: The pleasure is mine.

BH: I really enjoyed it.

MT: I hope I didn't talk too much.

BH: No, no, this is great stuff. I really enjoyed talking to you and I appreciate your time.

END: 1:14:00

