

Iron Workers Documentation Project

AUDIO LOG FORM

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

Contact: James Robert “Jimmy” Keane

Interviewer: Bucky Halker

Interview:

Date: January 13, 2013

Place: Bucky Halker Home (address above)

Other people present: Toni Wright Halker

Background noise: The recording was done at the home of Bucky Halker and the sound quality is good.

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

Recording medium used: Transcend 4 gigabyte SD memory card, uncompressed WAV format.

Recording engineer: Bucky Halker

Transcription: Toni Wright Halker

Summary description of audio interview content:

Jimmy Keane is a prominent Irish musician in Chicago, the USA, and Ireland. However, he began his career as an iron worker. In addition, his father was an iron worker who died on the job and his brothers continue in the trade. In the interview, Jimmy discusses his personal and musical background, his time as an iron worker, his father, Irish iron workers in Chicago, the music business, and unions in America. Halker already knew Keane for several years from his own involvement in the Chicago music scene. For that reason, the interview is less formal and more conversation in tone.

Audio Interview Contents

Counter
No./Time

00:01

BH: Just ah, tell me your name.

JK: My name is Jimmy Keane, K-E-A-N-E.

BH: Do you have a middle name? I never asked.

JK: Well, actually, I'm ah, because my grandfather was Jimmy and my father was James, I'm James Robert Keane.

BH: James Robert Keane, well actually, that would have been a good singer-songwriter's name.

JK: Yeah.

BH: What's his name, ah, there's another Keane out there, Robert Earl Keane.

JK: Robert Earl. Except I think that he spells his name slightly different. I am K-E-A-N-E.

BH: What year were you born?

JK: I was born in '58 in London, England.

BH: Oh, you were born in London?

JK: Yeah, my parents moved there in the '50s to work from Ireland. My dad was from Connemara, Galway. My mom is from Kerry. And they moved up to Meath then the early '50s then they moved to London in the early, no late, they moved to Meath in the '40s then to London in the '50s.

BH: And what was your dad doing in London for work at that time?

JK: He was working with my uncle, ah, they had a construction firm.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Mostly ground work, ah, not ironwork at the time. But you know, well work and digging ditches and . . .

BH: I would imagine that there were a lot of Irish doing that in England . . .

JK: Oh yeah, I'd say at certain points there were probably more Irish in London than there were actually in Ireland over the course of the years, you know.

BH: Wow.

JK: Ah, it was the easiest access point.

BH: Yeah. Then your dad and mom moved over here at some point?

JK: I was born in '58, ah, then we moved back to Ireland for a number of years. I had a sister born there, Anne Marie, she was born in Dublin and then ah, my dad moved out to the states by himself.

BH: Yeah.

JK: To ah, get work . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: And then we came out, I think in '62, ah, myself and my sister and one of my father's sisters and mother, obviously, came to Chicago. So we all met up here in '62, I think.

BH: So you were about four.

JK: Four.

BH: Four years old. So you went to school here in Chicago and everything?

JK: Well, we stayed here for a year then we moved back.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And then, so the time 1965 rolled around we were, and then I, on the Southside, 79th Street, St. Sabina.

BH: 79th, so you, didn't Liz Carroll grow up pretty close to that place . . .

JK: Liz Carroll grew up in, ah, Visitation.

BH: Wow.

JK: So she was like Garfield Blvd. and ah, wherever St. (?) is.

BH: Yeah. It's funny you mentioned 79th on there because my, I was talking to you about my grandfather working in the Stockyards . . .

JK: Sure.

BH: He actually grew up on 79th Street, ah, as well. This would have been back in the ah, oh God, yeah the early part of the century . . .

JK: Yeah.

BH: So, my own family was right from that same neighborhood. That's pretty interesting.

JK: Yeah.

BH: So you went to school then in that neighborhood?

JK: Well, I went to St. Sabina for grade school. I gone for a year a, in primary school in Trim in Meath in Ireland, and then came out here and then, started grammar school again in the states. And then since, 79th Street, St. Sabina, then we moved over to St. Nick's 63rd and Pulaski, where I stayed until I finished high school.

3:00

BH: Yeah. And, so, how did you get into ironworking then after high school?

JK: Well, ah, I took the apprenticeship exam.

BH: Oh, you did?

JK: My dad had been an iron worker since, I think about 1963.

BH: Okay.

JK: And, there was a, ah, you know, every couple of years, they would open up the ah, apprenticeship program and I took the exam . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and got called in September of '79.

BH: So, did your dad then, like he, when you came back from Ireland and sort of settled here permanently, did he find iron working right, . . . did he go through the apprenticeship program or did he . . .

JK: No.

BH: like work in through the construction industry and then get into the ironworking, how did that . . .

JK: At that time, you can just, you just, you know, you joined up with the union, so it got

you a card . . .

BH: A card?

JK: It was before, I think, they even started the apprenticeship programs for the iron workers, anyway. I could be mistaken, but I'm almost sure that's how it is, you got a card from, from Local 1 [IWU Local 1]. . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: here in Chicago.

BH: So you went through the whole, the regular apprenticeship program?

JK: I went through three years, yeah, three years of the apprenticeship program.

BH: Yeah, well how did that work? I mean, you had to work too for support while you were doing it right?

JK: Oh, you'd work, you'd work full-time and then you'd go to classes in the evening. So it was usually two, depending on the courses, two or three, at least two nights a week from 6-9 or something like that for three years. And summer as well.

BH: Yeah, and did that have an apprentice training center in Local 1 at that point?

JK: Yes, there was. Yes, when I started it was at um, off of ah, Lexington, right off of the, ah, Dan R, um, not the Dan Ryan, ah, the Eisenhower.

BH: Oh, okay.

JK: There's actually ah, there ah, a, ah, drivers license facility right next door to it.

BH: Oh, I know where that is. Yeah.

JK: And then they, they later moved out to Wolf Road . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: where the second, at least when I was there, the second union hall was and the apprenticeship program was in the back and they're off of Roosevelt Road . . .

BH: Yeah. I think I know where you're talking about.

JK: Yeah.

BH: I've been out to the 136 headquarters and 63. They're right next door to each other,

there. It's not far off of Roosevelt Road either out there.

JK: Well ah, Local 1 is in um, I forget where it is, it's just off of Roosevelt Road.

BH: Yeah, yeah, I was out there one time to interview the, actually one of the guys, ah what's his name? Oh, Satalic.

JK: Oh Babe Satalic.

BH: Yeah, Babe Satalic, exactly yeah.

JK: I knew his dad as well.

BH: Yeah, I've heard about his dad, yeah, in fact I got some pictures he gave me of his dad doing the ironwork.

JK: Great.

BH: Yeah, he was a fun guy to interview.

JK: Of course.

BH: Yeah. No bullshit at all . . .

JK: Is that right?

BH: Really straightforward . . .

JK: Exactly.

BH: a lot of fun to talk to him.

JK: The ah, term of endearment, because we were Southeastersiders, we were called "longhairs."

BH: Oh, is that right?

JK: Yeah, there was ah, even they didn't, you know most of them were ex-marine guys, you know short crew cuts, but they were called "longhairs". Don't ask me why, but that was . . .

BH: How interesting. So you went into ironworking in '79, did you say?

JK: Yeah, I started September of '79 as an apprentice.

BH: Yeah. Do you remember your first job?

JK: I did, I actually worked for my dad. And, um, right behind a, Holy Name Cathedral. It was the first ah, at the time, it was the tallest, post tension ah, job . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: it was like 60 stories . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: Post tensioning is where they ah, instead of actually using reinforcing all the way through the ah, concrete, they run these steel um, they're like huge steel encased a, ah, wire . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and they pour the concrete on it and then once the concrete cures, they actually tighten the ah, . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: these long cables basically.

BH: Yeah.

JK: They're run through all the ah, the floor and it's almost like if you were, they're set up like a mesh . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: In a, in a trampoline. And, once they tighten it, it actually taunts the whole floor and then it gives the floor bounce. . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: It's saved, it's cost, it's a cheaper way to do, or less expensive way to do things.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Because you don't use as much steel, you know.

BH: Yeah. So what kind of work were you doing? Putting in the cables?

JK: Oh, cables and reinforcing . . . they were all intertwined.

BH: Yeah. And then, after that, what kind of work did you do as an iron worker?

JK: I ended up staying, and I did a couple of small, ah, structural jobs, but again, if, if, a most of the Irish that were in Local 1, almost of them were ah, worked as reinforcing . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: or rodbusters or rodmen . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: as we were called. So we could basically work year round. Weather was less of a factor.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Even if you working on ah, like this building is a, is a reinforced building.
[Halker lives on the 34th floor of a highrise on the lake.]

BH: Yeah.

JK: Ah, so you know, you could work here, unless it was really windy and the cranes wouldn't work, you'd work year round.

BH: Yeah. Was your dad doing same thing?

JK: My dad was doing that as well. So either in reinforcing, or in high-rises ah, another, anything that involves steel and concrete mixed together.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So . . .

BH: Pretty much the whole City of Chicago?

JK: Exactly,

BH: Yeah.

JK: Even, even as much like the deep tunnel project. That was . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: all the, all the ah, tunnels going in were reinforced, all the ah, the, the main shoots going down were all reinforced, so we work on all those.

BH: Yeah, I've got . . .

JK: Sanitation areas, sanitary districts, we worked on sanitary districts.

BH: Sure. Yeah, I talked to one guy from 63 who worked on deep tunnel and also worked on Tip, Top, putting the tower on the top of the Sears Tower, so he's been at the highest and lowest here in the city. It seems like iron workers are all over town.

JK: Same thing. 63 was more of an ornamental iron worker . . .

BH: Yeah, yeah.

JK: Whereas ah, Local 1 was structural, so, you know actually supporting the whole

BH: Yeah, yeah.

JK: the whole building.

BH: Yeah, now I know there were sometimes jurisdictional battles. Probably not one in 63, but you must have had some in the Laborer's Union in your day, or not?

JK: You know ah, there weren't, no everything was pretty clear cut. I think that one of the things that actually helped ah, Local 1 being the only structural iron worker for basically the whole greater Chicagoland area . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and I think when I started there were maybe 2,500 iron workers. And that was one local versus probably, you know, every other block there was a carpenter's local,

BH: Yeah.

JK: every other block, there was, you know, electricians, well less the electricians, but or plumber's and laborer's, so they, they were all kind of split up, whereas there was only one iron worker's local.

BH: Sure.

JK: And, you know, I think at the time, there was no one else doing that work.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And, I think when work years ago, when you brought up the laborer's, when work was good, they gave away, the iron workers gave away the road work . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: cause that involved reinforcing as well. So they gave that to the ah, ah, laborer's

local.

BH: Yeah.

JK: But they couldn't actually use the pliers, they had to use twist ties . . .

BH: Oh, did they really? How interesting.

JK: Yeah, so if they used the pliers, they couldn't do it.

BH: Yeah.

JK: But they, they, so they reformulated twist ties, like that picture I showed you. Instead of actually using the pliers, they would have to use their hands.

BH: Now, it seems like, I've talked to a lot of guys from 63, they had conflicts with the laborer's. I can kind of see that because they did road work and some of the other stuff.

JK: Yes.

BH: You didn't do curtain wall too? Because it seems like 63 guys did a lot of curtain wall, did you, did you do any . . .

JK: Oh, you mean on the, on the ground?

BH: No, on the big buildings where they put the big, you know how on the outside they would bring in the window frame and put windows in and stuff . . .

JK: No. We didn't . . .

BH: You didn't do any of that?

JK: No, that's more ornamental, that's what they would do.

BH: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

JK: We would put up the basic structure.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Obviously, we got along with the other trades.

BH: Right. So some, did you work on any famous buildings downtown or anything, or around the area? Any favorite projects you really liked?

JK: You know ah, I ended up being an iron worker for a, I started in '79 and my career

ended in 1989, so I just had ten years in. But ah, I worked on a, some of the newer high rises, One South Wacker ah, I worked on a couple of the Blue Cross Blue Shield buildings. I worked on the new extension for McCormick Place.

BH: Yeah.

JK: In fact, I ended up working on a, there's a bridge, there's an overpass at ah, on Lake Shore Drive if you're heading North on Lake Shore Drive, before they re-routed it . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and ah, my father, Jimmy, of course, he also worked on it, he worked on the original McCormick Place.

BH: Oh wow.

JK: And, it turns out that, we found out that he was working on the ah, the original McCormick Place that the outside wall that was connecting to the ah, overpass,

BH: Yeah.

JK: above the, the Lake Shore Drive. He originally put that up.

BH: Wow.

JK: Crews working with him done that. And, then, years later, I actually worked putting the new . . .

BH: same spot.

JK: Well they had the adjoining walkway, and I worked on that one. So we actually worked on, you know . . .

BH: Oh, that's cool.

JK: X amount of years later. You know probably 20 years or 25 years later.

BH: In the period you were doing the ironwork, were you and your dad on the same sites a lot?

JK: Ah, yeah, I started with my dad for the. The first year I worked with him ah, on that ah, I think it was, what was it called Huron, Huron Towers.

BH: Ah huh.

JK: Kitty corner from ah, from ah, ah Holy Name Cathedral.

BH: Oh, oh okay.

JK: So I worked until maybe the second or third floor before the end.

12:00

BH: Yeah. So how did your iron career end? What, was it ah, the, the lure of music or, or something else?

JK: I had an argument with a scaffold.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And ah, yeah, I screwed up my knee.

BH: You did?

JK: Yeah, so I had multiple surgeries and yeah, so that put an end to that.

BH: Well, I know it's always been a dangerous job. You kind of were at least into the tie on era, right? You had to tie off in your day, or were there, were you kind of in the transition period? Because a lot of those old guys, man, they were crazy running around up there.

JK: The tie-in is, that's all relatively new.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Before, there was no way. There wasn't, you know, there was none.

BH: Yeah.

JK: I mean, you would, you would if you were working on a wall, you would hook into the wall, but now it's all . . . let's talk to my brother, it's all changed over the last fifteen years.

BH: Yeah, some of these guys don't even like it anymore because they have to . . . everytime they move six feet, they gotta . . .

JK: Yeah, there was no such thing as that.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You mean you had your wall hook.

BH: Yeah. Did you fall? I mean were you up high when you, when you fell or were you

. . .

JK: I ended up falling, I think I ended up falling seven foot . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: but it's . . .

BH: Well seven feet can do a lot.

JK: I ended up being in ah, I think it's called a pipe position, so my left knee was up by my ear.

BH: Oh.

JK: So everything, it just, just popped out, you know.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So I got wedged between a couple of ah, ah, big concrete pipes. We were actually working, believe it or not, we were actually working below ground.

BH: Oh.

JK: At the time that, that a, one of the sanitary districts.

BH: Oh, okay. And so, did you have to do some time in the hospital and then . . .

JK: Oh I did yeah. I had several surgeries.

BH: Oh.

JK: And so . . .

BH: And obviously it still bothering you. And that's the source of you're, you're gimp?

JK: Laughs. Yes.

BH: Have you had joints replaced anything yet or are you . . .

JK: Ah, my knee was completely redone.

BH: Oh, it was.

JK: Oh yeah.

BH: So did you just like, once you got out of the hospital, you just said that's the end of that, or were you . . .

JK: Well there was no way I could work again, they said, doing that.

BH: Yeah. Did you get any kind of payout on that from the iron workers or do you still get anything?

JK: No. No, I mean there, there was, you know, like ah, there would have been a workman's comp case that was settled many years ago.

BH: Yeah. So you didn't get any real, like longterm disability out of it.

JK: No.

BH: Hmm.

JK: You know I could, I ended up going back to school because you know, I had started college . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: back in the ah, '70, I started back in '77.

BH: Where did, where did you go?

JK: I originally went to DePaul University . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and then went to Loyola for a while. And then, I was on the 20-year plan and ended up getting a degree in '93 at the University of Illinois.

BH: Oh, you did.

JK: Yeah.

BH: Good for you. What's your degree in?

JK: In a Bachelor of Science and Marketing.

BH: Oh, all right, interesting. Well it's not bad for a musician to know how to do a little bit of marketing. Yeah, it's probably a good idea, as bad as we are at that so. So okay, you quit ironworking, but your dad was still working in the trade, right?

15:00

JK: My dad worked until ah, actually, it was the year after I, I think I got injured in '88, so it was '89 when I finished ah, my dad was actually, unfortunately killed.

BH: Yeah.

JK: On Michigan Avenue.

BH: He was.

JK: Yeah.

BH: Where was he working at the time?

JK: I think it was 900 North Michigan.

BH: Oh.

JK: Yeah, it was one of those . . .

BH: Yeah, right where the shop, the skyscraper shopping malls.

JK: Yes.

BH: Yeah, and I know there have been a lot of iron workers killed over the years. Did you fall off of the top or I mean what kind of a . . .

JK: I think he fell ah, from the 13th story.

BH: And ah, how old was your dad?

JK: He had just turned 60 that Christmas. He was ah, he was born December 24, 1928.

BH: Yeah. He's about my parents' age then. Wow. And, were your brothers already working in the trade by then?

JK: Well, in fact, my youngest brother, who is still alive, two of the brothers that are iron workers, Dennis and Michael.

BH: Are they in Local 1?

JK: Local 1, yes. Dennis started actually the same time as I did back in 1979 and then my brother, I think started in the mid-80s.

BH: Yeah.

JK: and he was actually working with my dad the day he was killed.

BH: Oh wow.

JK: Yeah.

BH: That's intense.

JK: It is.

BH: Yeah. That's a dangerous occupation.

JK: You know, it was ah, that day, I was actually . . . you know Michael Miles,

BH: Yeah.

JK: the banjo player?

BH: Oh sure yeah.

JK: working at the music program at the Old Town?

BH: Yeah, I run into Michael pretty regularly over there.

JK: Michael was doing his first solo album and I was up at a, I think it's Studio Media . .

BH: Yeah. I don't know if it's still there either, I remember the studio.

JK: I think the engineer was Benjie?

BH: Yeah.

JK: And we were recording, ah, I was recording, Michael decided he wanted to do a couple of ah, I remember the two tracks I played with Michael ah, ah, an old timey tune "The Cherokee Shuffle" . . .

BH: Oh yeah.

JK: So Michael was doing the claw hammer banjo and I was doing the accordion, couple of accordion passes, and he wanted to do an Irish tune called ah, the ah "Kitty's Rambles" . . .I forget the actual . . . was and it was a tune that I never cared for.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And ah, I said to Michael, I say hey you know, cause ah, jigs are usually in 6/8 time?

BH: Yeah.

JK: I said, “you know, why don’t you do it in 7/8?” He said, “okay.” I thought nothing of it and he came back and said, “you know Jimmy, we’re going to do it in 7/8.” I said, “what.”

BH: Yeah.

JK: So we recorded those tunes that day and I was actually coming down Lake Shore Drive at about 3:00 and coming back from the studio, headin’, headin’ back home and ah, I felt a pain, you know,

BH: Yeah.

JK: I knew something was wrong.

BH: Wow.

JK: So I got down to ah, I was going to meet, it was a Friday afternoon, I was going to meet a, a few iron worker buddies and friends at the 6511 Club, um, was also known as Flannigan’s?

BH: Uh huh.

JK: It was a great music house on the Southside for years and I walked in the bar and everyone just looked around and there were guys crying and they said, “haven’t you gone home?” And I said, “no”. Because this was before cell phones or anything . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: And ah, Jimmy McGowan told me that my dad was killed . . .

BH: Oh geez.

JK: that day. And I knew something happened when I was driving down Lake Shore Drive, didn’t know what it was, but I said, “hmmm, something’s wrong here.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And, it wasn’t anything visual or, you know.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So that was the day.

BH: Wow. While you were ironworking . . .

JK: It doesn't make for a humorous story . . .

BH: Yeah. Yeah, um, while you were ironworking, were you still playing music? Obviously, you were . . .

18:28

JK: Ah yeah, I've been playing music since I was . . .

BH: A teenager?

JK: seven, basically. I started when I was seven, but I supposed 13 or 14 when I started um, playing out in public and started playing, you know, doing gigs.

BH: Yeah.

JK: and stuff.

BH: Now, ah, I think Liz said, did, did you guys end up at the same school, or you both hang out at, was it McNamara's that they used to do a radio show or something? I remember, she said there was a connection, she said you guys met each other.

JK: Oh, when we were kids. I mean, we basically grew up playing. Yeah, ah, we used to live, when I mentioned before we lived on 79th Street, then we moved a few blocks down to 81st and Bishop . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: which was basically two blocks, where ah, Hanley's House of Happiness was.

BH: That's what it was.

JK: and Tom McNamara used to the radio broadcast in there and then years later that radio program continued on then Martin Fahey took over the radio program after Tom decided to retire from it. But Hanley's was the place. Every weekend I was in there with my parents, even as seven or eight years old, because it was a family, even though it was a pub, it was a family social place and it was music . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and then they did the live radio broadcast at night.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know every once in a while, they'd get up and play a few tunes.

BH: Did you get up?

JK: I did ya.

BH: Oh cool. Now did your dad teach you the accordion or was there someone else, or did you take lessons? How did you get into that instrument?

JK: I took ah, basic accordion lessons, because I play the piano accordion as opposed to the more traditional button accordion . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: or malodgian . So I took basic lessons for a few years from a guy on 79th Street, C.F. Marsch. He was a German, German American . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and then after that, just by ear – associating with all the Irish musicians in Chicago and then you know, I was fortunate enough to ah, be the same age as Liz. So we basically grew up playing together.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And, you know then and Michael Flatley came in a bit later and then Marty Fahey on the piano. Michael Flatley, of course, the Lord of the Dance dancer. He was actually a very good flute player.

BH: Oh, I didn't know that.

JK: and then you Marty Fahey, who plays, he started out on piano and now he plays the button accordion as well.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So we basically grew up.

BH: Yeah. Was there, there was a still a pretty thriving scene then ah, from what you're saying?

JK: Oh, it was.

BH: Chicago has always had a pretty vibrant Irish music scene.

JK: I think what happened in the ah, so like early '70s was, it coincided with the revival of, the ah, folk revival . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, in which, I know it started in the '60s you know, with the, with the Clancy Brothers coming over here and then Dylan and the whole New York folk scene . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and then people borrowing songs and,

BH: Sure.

JK: and, so I think the actual traditional aspect of that was a few years later,

BH: Yeah.

JK: So it was really, it was a thriving community.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Especially local. There were so many musicians here, ah, Kevin Henry, who was another iron worker.

BH: Oh really.

JK: Kevin, known as Kevin "Piper" Henry.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Played the flute and uilleann pipes. So he was always around 79th Street. So we learned from the likes of Kevin Henry, ah Johnny McGreevy, great fiddle player, Joe Shannon the Piper, ah, Eleanor Neary, a great pianist, Jimmy Neary, her husband, ah, I mean, you know, it goes on and on.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Burn Burnst [?], Tom Masterson . . .

21:35

BH: Now your dad was a singer, right?

JK: He was a *sean nos* singer, yes. His first, his first language was ah, he grew up in a place called Tierney Connemara in Galway and he ah, was there until about seven. I think 1935, they, there was a government relocation program, so they took 12 families from one of the poorest parts of Connemara and they moved 'em up closer to Dublin, about an hour away, a little Gaeltacht, a little Gaelic speaking community that they created in, a place they called Rath Cairn.

BH: Uh huh.

JK: in Meath. And they gave them a, you know, concrete house and a couple of acres of land . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and the resettled then there. There were, that happened a lot in the '30s, there was a, there was the, um, there was twelve, twelve families from, from Connemara. In fact, my grandfather wasn't even supposed to go, but someone decided last minute that they didn't want to go, so they asked my grandfather, Jim, if he wanted to go, and he said "yes", he brought the seven kids that were born in Connemara. Moved up to Meath and there was another six born in Meath.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And then there was a, ah, the next County over, there was a Donegal, Gaeltacht, where they took people from Gaelic speaking parts of Donegal and they moved them to Meath as well. And then there was a smaller Kerry, Gaeltacht.

BH: So was the government trying to create these kind of model communities, 'cause I know they did that here in the '30s too. There is one up by Milwaukee, there's one in Maryland, I mean there's, yeah, I've heard about these in the U.S., was that, was that what the government were doing?

JK: I think, I think it might have been two part. You know, I, I never really, I should have looked into it a bit more. I think a lot of it was just for economic reasons . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: Because you know, at least they could, they went from basically being . . .

BH: The house . . .

JK: Well, they went from fishermen . . .

BH: Oh.

JK: 'cause back, it was all stone and rocks, so you were fishermen . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: you know, so now they moved up there, they got a couple of head of cattle . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: couple of pigs, chickens, so they became farmers.

BH: Yeah.

JK: I mean, that's the short version of it. And, I suppose there was something as well, they wanted to actually preserve the language . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: So there was the language component, as well. 'Cause they were all, again, native Irish speakers.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So when they moved up to Meath, I mean there were people that eventually learned English. My father learned English. My grandfather could speak good English, but my grandmother, she lived until she was about 95, in Meath and she didn't speak English at all.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Even though all of her kids spoke, they were bilingual at that point . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and obviously all of her grandkids and great-grandkids.

BH: Did your dad's singing ability influence you as a musician?

JK: Oh yeah, definitely yeah.

BH: Did he teach you to sing when you were a kid? Did you start doing that while you were, even before the accordion or?

JK: Yeah, I could sing a bit, but it was, it was horrible.

BH: [Laughs] That's not your best suit, is a, singing?

JK: No, I was just a, they told that I wanted to actually play the accordion, and specifically, I wanted to play the piano accordion. So, I don't know where that came from.

BH: Interesting.

JK: You know. I mean we grew up in the, even though we were, you know, on 79th Street, I mean, it was such a huge, at that time, it was such a huge Irish population as

well.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And so, you know we were always, you know people at our apartment were Irish and their kids were Irish Americans, so . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: you know, just, it was part of the, we didn't know any different, you know. I suppose the only thing that I regret from that time was, you know when I moved over here first I was an Irish speaker. But then my parents thought it might have been detrimental if I, you know, still spoke Irish in school.

BH: Oh, I suppose you're right.

JK: And so, later people that came out in the '70s and '80s and if their kids were bilingual, they kept them bilingual.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, so it got to the point where my mom and dad, my mom's a native speaker as well, she is Kerry Irish, so they would, the only time they would start speaking Irish was when they didn't want us to know what was going on.

BH: [Laugh] You're probably right though about the dating of that, because it seems like most immigrants tried not to speak their native language, or encourage their kids to learn English quickly, but then at some point . . .

JK: It was the opposite.

BH: Yeah, it's like the bilingualism became like okay. You know, I think it's good, I mean it's great, you know.

JK: Oh, I think that's, that's . . . [interrupted]

BH: Yeah, you know 'cause my family, there were Germans on my mom's side and they just, they didn't want to have anything to do with it once they got here. Like my great-grandfather forbid them from speaking German, you know . . .

JK: Yeah.

BH: just was, that was just a different world, you know, but it's changed now and I think that is probably for the better that we keep two languages.

JK: But they did actually, I mean, the best part they did encourage music, so there's always music at the house.

BH: That's good.

JK: And of course, you know, all the, all the, every place we ever went out to, there was music there. There was either, you know, people playing on stage, Irish traditional music or there were sessions.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So you know, it was the environment that I grew up in.

26:22

BH: Um, most of those musicians probably had day jobs, even the most well-known of them, right?

JK: Oh, I would say almost all of them at that time.

BH: It wasn't really a professional category at that point for that, I mean, you couldn't, it would have been hard to earn your living the way . . .

JK: Yeah, I think that started, that started more so in the '70s

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know there were more that started doing it . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: And then more so if you were more on the singing side of it then actually on the instrumental side.

BH: Yeah.

JK: But then again at the same time, that's when groups started, ah, they weren't really, ah, I mean aside, from ah, within, there weren't really groups . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: in Irish music until about the '70s. Aside from Ceili bands, that were used to play for dancing.

BH: Yeah.

JK: But then folk groups came out, and off shoots from folk groups, like ah, oh, like the Chieftains, where there was music, dance and song . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: ah, and then there was, you know, the Bothay Band, De Dannan, ah,

BH: Sure.

JK: you know, and a ton of groups like that.

BH: So, when you, after you got injured and you're, you were playing music, when did you start to think that maybe that could be your career?

JK: Well even at that time, I had always been playing even while I was an iron worker, I was always playing music.

BH: Yeah. So it was a pretty natural transition for you?

JK: Yeah, it was yeah, I mean because, we had, you know, it was just something we did, you know, I mean at that point, it was just something we'd do whether we were getting paid or not.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So, you know, it was the next transition was to do that, and then you know, rely on that for income.

BH: Yeah. Do you think, you know, having been a ah, an iron worker, did it effect your aesthetics of playing music at all? Have you ever thought about that or . . .

JK: Well you know I . . .

BH: having worked in a blue-collar job that you know is really physical?

JK: as if you couldn't get anymore blue collar than music . . . laughing.

BH: Well that's true [Laughter] . . .

JK: I mean, you know, I mean, you know, if you think about it, I mean, if you had a trade in Chicago, when I started, what was it I said, in '79, I mean, for, you know, for being a high school graduate, with some, you know a couple of years of college and ah, who were making \$25-\$30 an hour, so that was, you know, you work all the overtime as an iron worker, that was double . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, my first job, we were working seven 12's.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, I mean it kind of became ridiculous, because after awhile, after so many hours, you were just paying it all in taxes anyway.

BH: Yeah.

JK: I mean, you know so, so it would be hard to match that, as a musician.

BH: Yeah, unless you were world famous.

JK: Of course.

29:00

BH: Yeah. So, did you move into a full time career as a musician like shortly after that, or did you still like, have to do other jobs to pick up money?

JK: Well for the most part, yeah, it was.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, like in the '90s and 2000, I was involved in real estate . . .

BH: Yeah, I remember you talking about that.

JK: as well, so, it was primarily ah, I mean I supposed the avocation is as a musician and always will be.

BH: Yeah, yeah. And, and, ah, I mean it sounds like your career is a little bit like mine, and since you've kind of come in and out of being a full time musician, is that accurate? Has your musical fortune improved or whatever? I mean, for me, sometimes it's been good as a musician, sometimes it hasn't been good, you know. I mean, I was a teacher . . .

JK: Of course, yeah.

BH: I quit teaching because I was getting so busy playing music, but then after five years of doing that suddenly, like oh my God, I'm in the hole again, I got do something, so has your career been kind of like that too?

JK: Yeah, exactly, yeah, up and down.

BH: Yeah. Does that frustrate you sometimes, I mean, as much as it frustrates me or,

JK: Well, it, it is, you know, I think, now even more so now. Because, you know people don't go out, I mean, there's less people. I just heard on the radio the other day, I mean,

you know there's less live music venues in Chicago . . . And you know Chicago was, at one time, there was, every, even a local bar would have live music on a Friday or Saturday night . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: now that's . . .

BH: Well, it's funny you should say that, because I've always thought there was a book in that, I keep thinking in my head about the, the decline of live music in America, 'cause you know where I grew up, way up in Ashland, Wisconsin, which a real blue collar town near Duluth, I mean if you went out on any Friday night to a tavern, it might not be the music I wanted to hear, but there was always an accordion player and like, or somebody at the Wurlitzer or whatever playing live music. There were polka bands at all the weddings. It just was live music was pretty much part of the, the scenery. And then, you know, we transitioned it into the rock era and all the bars had rock bands. Local guys playing cover songs . . .

JK: Sure.

BH: Beatles, Stones, Animals, that kind of crap. Um, but you go up there now, and you, there's no live music around. You might be one club in the whole area that's got on Friday night might have a live band, so and I noticed, just like you were saying, in Chicago, in 25 years that I've lived here, it just seems to be less live music. I don't know, do you agree, right?

JK: That, that's, it's true, yeah, yeah. I mean a lot of that has transitioned to ah, ah, karaoke, I mean, you know, I'll . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: which is not really . . .

BH: And do you feel too, like, I mean, I don't want to name names of club owners, I could, but it seems to me, that a lot of the club owners don't want to pay a guarantee anymore and they don't support the artists as much as they used to.

JK: Yeah, there's very few that do.

BH: Yeah.

JK: I mean what's the longest running place now with music? The Green Mill?

BH: Probably.

JK: That's probably . . .

BH: FitzGerald's would be another one.

JK: FitzGerald's of course, yeah, but I think The Green Mill has been around a bit longer, hasn't it?

BH: Yeah, I think so too. Yeah.

JK: You know especially anything that might have any resemblance to folk or ethnic music, would be FitzGerald's . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: on a regular basis. And then obviously, you know, there's the performing centers like the Old Town School, ya know, they've been, that's part of their mission from, since day one. . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: to present music. Then there's also new places like Space up in Evanston and ah, so there's always performance venues, but more for established acts than for someone just starting out.

BH: Yeah. Yeah, I find that too and I'm not just starting out and neither are you, but there's so many national acts that can work FitzGerald's or Space, it's hard to slot, I don't know if you feel that way, it's harder to slot yourself into those gigs than it was 20 years ago.

JK: Oh exactly, yeah, yeah.

BH: Yeah, I find it more difficult.

JK: And, it's always been hard if you live here, playing here, its . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: I mean, you have to go some place else.

BH: Yeah, I feel that way. I noticed you're getting ready to hit the road.

JK: Yes.

32:50

BH: Yeah, so in fact, that's a segue there. Do you do all of the bookings for, for you and Pat?

JK: Well, you know this, yes. I mean, we had, you know, we had, we've agents over the years,

BH: Yeah.

JK: but we've been kind of on a hiatus for the last couple of years so. This is, you know, we'll just go out when we can.

BH: Yeah. And, are you trying to think of ah, I mean, besides playing the live gigs, have you been involved in other ways to try and to figure out how to get your music out there, I mean? I'm always trying, you know, not just internet stuff, but I'm always trying to hustle different ways of thinking about the music industry, I don't know if you're that way. Does your marketing background help you try to think of new ways to market yourself and get your music out there?

JK: You know, yeah, there are ways and there's a lot of things happening now that ah, ah, you know, instead of, you know we were talking about live music, the ah, there's a few services now where you can actually do concerts from your home?

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, and I forget the name. I didn't think we were going this way with this conversation . . .

BH: Yeah, I didn't either.

JK: But there's a, there's a couple services where you can actually, you know, you can set, you can do a 15 minute show . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: at 9:00 on Friday, and then it, a little streaming show, you can do it from your, from your office, from your . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: you know . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: but then again, you are relying on video, so bringing the show to them, instead of . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know.

BH: Are you still actively recording new material?

JK: Yeah, actually, I'm working on, I'm working on um, in fact, it was Liz, that prompted me to do, she said, "You know, Jimmy, you should do, you know, do, do an album or book of, of the tunes you've written over the years." So, so I'm in the process of ah, writing some more tunes and putting that all together.

BH: Yeah. And, you and Pat have been playing together, how many years now?

JK: Oh, ah, as the whole, probably on and off since about 1999.

BH: Yeah.

JK: But I've known Pat Broder, since ah, since he came here in '91 or '92.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Pat's over 20 years here, from Dublin.

BH: Yeah. You, you were a trio for a while, right?

JK: Oh we were a trio and then we were a quartet.

BH: Oh you were?

JK: Yeah.

BH: So was that a financial decision to keep it now at a duo level or?

JK: Yeah, you know, well it made more sense and more so, even musically. For some reason, when Pat and I started playing together we just hit it off right away.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So we didn't have to think about, I could try a new tune and he'd get it right away.

BH: Yeah.

JK: instead of actually having to learn, to teach someone else the tune or let them figure it out. It became very freeing, even though you are limited then ah, musically, even it there's, it's always nice to play off of another melody instrument.

BH: Yeah.

JK: But you know, Pat started playing more tunes and so you kind of interchange. And, I always liked playing chordal stuff off of tunes.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So it seems to work so far.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know and Pat sang, so that actually makes it more ah, accessible to ah, the general audience.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And that's not saying that people wouldn't ah, like just instrumental music, but it's definitely a harder sell.

BH: Yeah. Yeah, I agree with you. Do you guys go over to Europe?

JK: We have yeah.

BH: You go to Ireland.

JK: Mostly Ireland, yeah.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And we did ah, Canada, Australia.

BH: So, so right now um, besides doing the music thing, what are you doing to try to ah . . .

JK: Well now it's a the music . . .

BH: You're back to doing it full time?

JK: Yeah.

BH: So how's that working so far?

JK: Oh, lovely.

36:15

BH: Yeah. Was that, I know the real estate market kind of ah, tanked and you were involved with that right?

JK: Oh I was, yeah, I was a developer.

BH: Oh you were? Okay.

JK: Yeah.

BH: And then suddenly bank loans became more difficult or just everything got more difficult?

JK: Well the banks called in their loans basically and . . .

BH: It made things difficult.

JK: Oh, yeah.

BH: Yeah. And, ah, so, did you, your decision to jump back into music full time was that prompted by the decline of the real estate part of it or, just like you just made a decision anyway, it was just time to put more . . .

JK: Well, I never really stopped playing it was just a matter of you know what . . .

BH: the levels of . . .

JK: Yeah.

BH: Yeah. Well that's kind of like mine. Some years it might be 30% of it and some years it might be 90%, it just depends on, who knows what makes it go that way.

JK: Yes.

BH: Yeah. So, just to get back to the iron workers, now your brothers are all still, how many brothers are still in the trade?

JK: I have two brothers that are still in the trade.

BH: Are they both Local 1.

JK: Both Local 1, correct.

BH: And you mentioned once that one was a contractor too? Had one of them gone into contracting end of it?

JK: Yeah, he's a superintendent for ah, ah, M A Steel Erectors.

BH: Okay.

JK: They're based out of, I think Palos.

BH: Okay and does he um, can you, ah, I've always wondered about this of the guys that kind of move outside of the labor part of it. Does he keep, can he keep his union membership going then?

JK: Oh of course, yes. Oh yeah, cuz, I mean, he's, he's basically the superintendent for the company. So he's like the working superintendent.

BH: Does he, like for a whole job site, or just for the iron portion of it?

JK: Oh, for the, for the iron, iron workers ah, and the same thing like with plumbers and electricians, they're all subcontractors, subcontractors to whom whoever the general contractor would be.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So then you know, if ah, John Smith Construction is putting up a new 50 story high rise . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: They'll, you know they have the plans out there, and then they'll send out bids to the subcontractors.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So you know A, A sewer or A plumbing will compete against B plumbing for they'll bid on that job . . .

BH: That job?

JK: and the same thing with the iron workers. And the same, with you know carpenters. Well usually the carpenters are hired by the general contractor.

BH: Yeah.

JK: But all the other trades, they'll all bid on that job.

BH: So then you're . . . I'm, I'm just trying to understand how that all gets done, it's always been kind of curious to me, so if your brother's a superintendent, does he determine then how many workers he is going to need on a particular job or . . .

JK: Yes.

BH: and he calls Local 1 and says "Hey, I need, you know, these guys, or we need this many for this long"?

JK: Yeah, well, he'll know, because he usually you know, bid out the guys that are working with him for several years, so he tries to keep them busy . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: even though they are all Local 1 members . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and you know, when he needs more there's other people. It, it's, you know, 'cause it's a small knit community . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: again, because now there's, I don't think there's, you know maybe 1500 iron workers. I know there's only 15 or 1600 current in Local 1 iron workers, but I think only 400 are working.

BH: Yeah, I agree, it's pretty, yeah.

JK: You know.

BH: Yeah, talking to 63. It's the same thing.

JK: And you know, a couple of years ago, when work was really good, I think my brother had, you know, a hundred.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Hundred, plus, guys working for him.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know. Now he's down to, he's probably down to ten.

BH: And does he, your other brother work with your brother . . .

JK: He does on occasion, yeah.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Yeah.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Because the thing is you, you work for, you work out of the hall basically . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: but very, you know, for years very few people worked out of the hall.

BH: Yeah.

JK: I mean you're still, does that make sense? If you were working for one of the big iron contractors for years was Gateway, and you know so they would have the regular crew and they'd always have new work in, and if they needed more guys they would either call up the people who worked for them before, you know, or get someone out of the hall.

BH: Yeah.

JK: But then, since everyone knows each other knows all of the contractors, you know . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: so certain guys won't work for company A and you know . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: unless they're, that's the only job.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And other guys will only work for company A, they won't go anywhere else. If they're going to be slow for two weeks, they'll take the two weeks off.

BH: Oh, that's interesting.

JK: You know.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So you're not it's, I'm not sure how other unions work.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, from my experience, seniority didn't really play into it.

40:45

BH: Yeah. When you were, when you were on the job um, and maybe your brothers talk about this, um, were there any ethnic tensions at all or racial tensions?

JK: No.

BH: No?

JK: Not, I mean . . .

BH: You were kind of the post-racial, you know that if I talked to some of the guys from the '60s . . .

JK: Oh, I can imagine, yeah.

BH: Yeah, and they didn't even like long hairs, there was that hippy versus the old guy thing too. But you probably came in a little past the worst part of that, right?

JK: Yeah, in fact, there, uh, when, when I think of my youngest brother was working as an iron worker, ah, I think when he started the apprenticeship, they were one of the first classes where uh, women were part of it . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: were part the class.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Or maybe a couple of years after that.

BH: So, it's much different than it was a long time ago.

JK: It is, yes, I mean, regardless.

BH: How did your ah, I mean I don't know if it's from the ironworking um, you seem, how did that experience being Irish and your dad's in the union, how did that effect your own politics?

JK: Oh well, I mean, Irish Catholic Democrat, I mean, there were certain things (laughs)

BH: Yeah, and pro-union. I mean there are . . .

JK: and pro-union, oh yeah. Of course yes. I mean I always grew in, you know, and as soon as it became possible to join, ah, the Musician's Union, I did.

BH: Yeah, yeah.

JK: I mean and Local 1000, the traveling musicians, started by, ah, another fellow Wisconsinite, ah, John McCutcheon.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know John?

BH: Yeah, I do.

JK: You know, and once he started that, it was perfect, so I've been a Local 1000 member since, since they initiated.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So, it's I suppose the only thing we knew, because I mean if you, if you working, you know, even if most trades got paid better than someone else working a blue collar job, because I mean, it is, there is a lot of skill involved . . .

BH: Yeah, I agree . . .

JK: you can't walk off the street and do it. I mean certain, you know, I suppose someone could teach you, you know, to use a shovel overnight,

BH: Yeah.

JK: you know, someone's not going to be able to teach you to operate a crane . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: in two hours, or they're not going to how to, how to wire an electrical, electrical for, you know, a 50 story building, put plumbing in. So they're all, you know, they're honest trades and it does take a bit of . . .

BH: Oh, I agree, completely.

JK: intelligence and gumption, you know?

BH: Yeah. Well that was one of the things, um, and I'll get back union thing, but one of the things I've notice with the iron workers is that there were, all of them that I've talked to, were all good problem solvers on some level, figuring stuff out when it doesn't quite fit right. Do you . . .

JK: Oh [laughs]

BH: You know, I mean some of the older guys only went to like the sixth grade, but they still, I mean, if you talk to them about a technical thing or how to do, you know, stainless steel welding or something with no seams in it, this is Local 63, they how to do that . . .

JK: Oh, they know how to do that, yeah.

BH: Yeah, you know, I'm really surprised at how skilled they really are, even if we, maybe the general public doesn't know that, you know. I don't know.

JK: My, my dad, Jimmy, he was only saying this as a joke, but at one point he said, "You know, if donkey's had fingers, we'd all be out of work." [Laughter] Because it was a lot of brut force . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Because you know sometimes something that something that the ah, you know, or the engineer, the architect draws out and then you know, they ah, back in terms of like reinforcing, sometimes you actually have to ah, create that piece on the job . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and bars . . . and all of the sudden, you know, you're not going to fit that stuff in there, so, you know, if you're limited with the, if you have X amount of steel that has to go into this smaller space . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: you, you figure it out, because if it's not in there, then they can't . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: they can't pour it and so it's not going to be approved. So, you learn quickly . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: the way to do things.

44:30

BH: Does your brother ever complain about architects, like, build, or coming up with plans that aren't very realistic when it, he has to put them together?

JK: You know, it was again, in my limited experience there, I mean there were, they had to make switches on . . .

BH: like on the fly . . .

JK: on the fly, because what works on paper doesn't always work all of the sudden when

there's a, you know,

BH: Yeah.

JK: you know main pipe coming thru or the electricals in there being . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: you can't really see until you lay it out and you're working on that, that spot.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So there's always, there's always been modifications of some, some nature. Nothing major, but they have to go re-do the plans, then get it approved.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, you, because what works on paper when you're moving a little pencil around and all the sudden when you're moving, you know, when you're moving a piece of steel that weighs, you know, that weighs several hundred pounds, and there's twenty of them.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know.

BH: Different story.

JK: Yeah, it might not, it might not work.

BH: Yeah. So then you do, you have to know how to problem solve in that regard.

BH: Yeah. And now, I'm switching back to the union question here, and I've asked everyone of the iron workers this, there, I mean obviously they are all pro-union, what do you think maybe, what do you think of the current situation with American labor, not necessarily iron workers, but just in general and, and does, I mean there is a huge public outcry against unions as you probably know . . .

JK: Of course, yeah.

BH: I mean, and maybe you just want to comment on that or give me ah, you know, your spiel on that, I'm just curious what you think.

JK: Well, you know, I, I, ah, historically, I think, you know, people were opposed to unions and it was usually people that were controlling things that didn't necessarily want the unions because, you know, why, you know, why deal with a group instead of actually

being able to deal with individuals and I think that was the whole part of the, you know, work . . . It's funny when I get all of these things, you know, and you figure if it wasn't for unions there'd be no forty hour work week, there wouldn't be any pensions, there wouldn't be any workman's comp, there wouldn't be all these things that we take for granted and all the other occupations, even aside from the trades or, unions in general, they all came from the union movement.

BH: Yeah.

JK: It's part of our, I think it's part of our American culture, to have it.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And then of course, the same thing anytime someone has something, someone wants to take it away from you and vice versa. So I think, you know, it's a, it's really a travesty what's happening, and you know, and I mean, the most evident thing, locally, has been next door Wisconsin, when he wants to get rid of, the current governor wanted to get rid of all the state unions. You know, and you know, which means then firemen, policemen, I mean all those teachers, you know the sanitation workers, the, the janitors that clean up the state buildings . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: it's

BH: Yeah, do you think a lot of the public outcry against the union, is just, I mean, some of it is coming from people who are also blue collar workers themselves, do you think they've just been misinformed, do you think maybe the unions haven't done a good job of making their case for the past thirty years, since Reagan was elected?

JK: Yeah, I mean once, once when he, when he de-certified the ah, air traffic controllers, I was working as an iron worker at that time. I remember there was, there was holy hell about that thing, because he said he could do that. I mean obviously, you know, there was safety concern and all of that stuff, but still, you think, wait a second, these are, you know, that's happening to them, is it going to happen to us next?

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know and I think that even happens even, I know recently there was a um, I think just across the border in Indiana, where maybe just in Lansing, ah, they wanted to bring in um, a ironworking firm from Arizona, I can't remember their name, but they were non-union, and they wanted them to work because they got the bid and I figured they came up to some agreement so they'd have to get higher wages than they were being paid by their employer to work in Chicago. But then, you know, a lot of it, I would imagine, they would be skirting rules here or there because I mean, paramount the whole thing is to be safe.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, and that's, you know, so that's why you train for this stuff, you know, you try to be as safe as possible because no one wants to see anyone hurt, no one wants to see anyone killed, but unfortunately it happens all the time. And it's more likely to happen someone that's inexperienced. You know, I mean, so you'd imagine that you know, that, if you were an employer, you'd want the best person for your job to the best equipped and best trained. You know if that means, you know part of a, you know someone gone through a union apprenticeship, and is there with safety in mind. He'd be the choice person than some guy coming off of the street, here grab this blowtorch and start going at it. I mean I know it's a simplistic way of looking at it, but makes the same difference, you know, no teacher's union. Can you can teach? Yeah, I can teach . . .

BH: Yeah, go to it.

JK: [Laughs] Where'd you go? I graduated from sixth grade . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know? So, I mean, I, I think it's terrible and, and maybe because the shifting of the economy as well, because we're, you know, we're making less things. I mean obviously because we're still building things, but as you mentioned, you know, I mean, it's probably safer now to be on a building site than it ever was ever.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, with the rules and safety men all over the place and you can't do this and can't and that's good, you know. I mean it makes it, takes the work longer . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, so.

BH: Yeah.

JK: I'm not sure if that answered your question.

BH: Well yeah, I mean . . .

JK: I don't like it, I don't like it anyway.

50:14

BH: Yeah. I mean you and I are both pro-union and I'm always, like, thinking in my head, like you know, I expect the ruling elite, whoever that might be in any country, is going to be anti union because it's not in their interest, to have groups of, you know

groups of people banding . . .

JK: Collective bargaining.

BH: Collective bargaining, you know, because the people at the top want to take as much as possible. It just seems the way they want to go, but it just seems like it's so bad the last, you know, say 20 years in the United States and worse than it is in Europe, so, you know, I just wanted to get your kind of feelings on that. You know, how you felt about it and you know, Chicago's also a union town and even here you can see it.

JK: Of course.

BH: You know, we've got a mayor now, I mean, as you know, who doesn't seem as interested in supporting unions as Mayor Daley may have been or his father.

JK: Of course, or those before him.

BH: Yeah, or those before him.

JK: Mmm. I've always wondered now, you know, as we've becoming more of a knowledge based economy, or in theory we're supposed to be, so what happens with the software engineer, is he, I mean, is he just an individual and that's it, and he's, you know, you know . . . I am surprised, I mean I know that every once in awhile, they try to, because Illinois's not a, I don't think it's a right-to-work state, right?

BH: No.

JK: But there are certain, there's a push for it, you know. It's . . . and maybe, I don't know, it's . . . It doesn't make sense to me. But then, of course, I'm a product of that so, it's hard for me to accept. I mean, I could understand why people would want to, not have unions, but I mean as a union member, I mean, I couldn't have seen doing it, without being in the union . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: at all. And it's all, I never thought of it as a bad thing, because here are all these people looking after my interest, you know and obviously they're own as well, but I mean they are all part, I mean all of the union officials I know, were always workers, who had just got elected. A democratic process, you'd run for ah, you know, financial secretary/treasurer, you'd run for business agent, you'd run for president of, you know, the local and there's term limits. Matter of, matter of fact, my, my dad, Jimmy, was ah, he was sergeant of, sergeant of arms for the Local 1, for, oh God, for 15 or 20 years. You know, in addition to being the job steward for most jobs that he was on. You know working steward.

BH: Yeah.

JK: There were certain times when, you know, there was over 50 iron workers on the site, then you became a walking steward, because you couldn't you know, you had to watch out for everyone's safety and make sure there were no violations, but ah, that was in addition to whatever the contractor might, or the superintendent for the company that was hiring you to do the work. You know. So, I wouldn't know things without a union.

52:55

BH: Yeah. Do you think the musician's union, ummmm, do you have any comments on that? I have my own, but I'll let you comment first though.

JK: Yeah, you know, I, I, I mean aside from the fact, you know, I'm proud to be Local 1000 within the AFM, I think musicians have always been, unless it comes to certain things, you know, unless you're doing TV or radio, there are certain things where, where people accept the rules, at least for the most part . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: on the ground they don't.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, it's not, you know. It's better to be part of the AFM, it doesn't really cost that much more than not being in the union.

BH: Yeah, well that's how I look at it.

JK: You know and there are certain things it can help. I think that you know, just the way, there, any, all the sudden you pick up the guitar and you're a musician. And if, John Doe wants to pay you \$5 to play for an hour, why should I pay, you know \$135 hour musician rates, for the same thing. I mean that's there attitude. Whereas, we say "Hey, well this guy is much better. He's been doing it all his life." You know.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, I suppose, you know, the rock and roll stuff kind of really broke that open.

BH: Yeah, I think that's . . .

JK: And then part of the same thing back in the '60s and '70s. You know. But all the main, um, you know the top musicians, you know or the popular musicians, they're all local members some place, but I think maybe just in, just on paper. But of course if you're pulling in, you know, if you're pulling, you know, in several million dollars a year for singing "baby, baby, baby" . . .

BH: Right, you got to pay 1% in work dues, what's the big deal? You know, it probably doesn't affect them very much.

JK: No it doesn't.

BH: Yeah, I'm kind of like you, I mean, I keep my dues up and I'm in the union, but it's hard for me . . .

JK: Are you in the 1000?

BH: Yeah, I'm still in 1000, yeah and ah, I've been in, oh God, 30 some years and ah, but it's hard to see the real positive benefits, you know. It used to be and maybe you got a few of those, now and then, when they had the trust fund stuff and you'd get a gig to play in a park now and then or something? I only had, did you ever get any of those where they'd pay your fee? It wasn't as high as some places, but at least you got something out of it.

JK: No, because ah, because ah, when, when I was doing that stuff earlier, there wasn't any, there wasn't, it was pre-Local 1000 and you know the locals here in Chicago, you do, what, you play what, you mean you don't play the horn? [Laughs]

BH: Yeah.

JK: or jazz standards. What?

BH: That's true.

JK: So they looked what? Yeah, we'll take your money, but I mean, I don't know, we have nothing for you.

BH: Yeah, that's a good point. Well it strikes me that that is one of the big failings of the musician's union, unlike the iron workers. The iron workers is constantly adapting to whatever new technology comes along in order to keep the union relevant. But the musician's union still operates, other than Local 1000, they still operate like it's the 1950 or something.

JK: Yeah.

BH: You know. It never came to grips with rock and roll or the fact that we don't play, you know, three weeks on Rush Street anymore. Or, you do one nighters. That's the way it is. You know. It's just the way the entertainment industry is structured now, it's completely different from my vantage than it was in 1935 or 1950, and people would go down to the union hall then, too, and "oh so and so, needs a sax player". You never even hear of anything like that anymore.

JK: Yeah, it's true.

BH: It just doesn't, you know, you don't go through the union hall to get a gig anymore with somebody. So I think it's a much different situation.

56:20

Well, I've kind of asked you the key questions. I mean, do you, if you want to, if there's something I missed, that you're thinking about with the iron workers, or your dad or your brothers, just feel free to fire away. I don't know if there's some stuff that I didn't cover in the equation.

JK: I, I think we covered, you know, I mean, it's, I think, it's, it can be a great way to make a living. You know, I suppose the one difference, just for iron workers, I mean, if you were, I'm not saying they're any less or anything like that, but if you were an electrician, you know you work your 40 hours on the new construction and then you actually wire homes on the weekends and if you were a plumber, carpenter, you could, you know, your trade can travel outside of your, your day job, but if you're an iron worker, that's all you did.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, do you ah, need a five story concrete structure in your backyard? No, that's not going to happen [Laughter].

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, so I suppose that's why, you know, ah, and more power to the ah, you know, to ah, the local in general, they always kept because they knew, you know, we need enough guys to keep this working and we need to stay the one, the one local. So they were always smart in that regard. You know, I mean very seldom, if the iron workers went on strike, there was no work then, because you know,

BH: They would shut down everything.

JK: they would shut down everything. And not that they would want to . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know.

BH: Were you involved in any strikes when you were in the union?

JK: Yeah, actually, in ah, when Reagan was in office, yeah. I think we went on strike and it was like, you know, two days or three days. They'd be over quickly.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Whereas I know it would take longer like if the carpenters or laborers were on strike because there were so many locals involved to get them all to agree. Where it was only one local. You know.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So it was either yay or nay. There was splitting, you know.

BH: Yeah.

JK: Conquer or divide. The iron workers would say “we ain’t going to do that . . .”

BH: Yeah. It seems that, that, you know, having that kind of power is one reason the contractors finally made their peace, way back when with the iron workers because they have to, I mean they seem so dependent, and you can’t replace them like with other workers, the way you can on some jobs in United States. It’s not like you can, you know what I mean?

JK: Yeah. You know it was funny, aside from big huge jobs, I remember the first job I worked on with my dad, and um, it was myself, my dad, ah four other Irish guys, ah, and an African American, Oscar Johnson, and so ah, there was seven of us, that did the whole building. And all the other trades had you know, 20, 30, you know, so you could do a lot, with just two people, you know.

BH: Wow.

JK: We were working for ah, McHugh. At the time of the big ah, contractor, general contractor. And he always believed that, in fact, when you mentioned Bourbonnais, or one of your relatives were down there, the, the superintendent for the iron workers, his nickname was Cat, I forget his last name, but he said, “you know if we can, if we can get the job done with ah, seven people, why do you need eight?”

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, he said “I’d rather pay you guys more, more hours”.

BH: Sure.

JK: You know, so it’d be like, you know, as if you were, you know, a seven man rotation on a basketball team or you know, that was it. Everyone you worked together you knew, you didn’t have to think about it, you did it.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know.

BH: Well, I know one question I haven't asked you, was ah, . . .

JK: I don't know if that made sense.

1:00:00

BH: No, no, that made a lot of sense. The iron workers have a reputation, even today, for being heavy drinkers, did you, was that still a, a component, I mean so of the, some of the, some of the guys now in the, at least the official, officials in the union now like to down play it and say it's more limited, and it probably is, but was it still integrated into the, the . . .

JK: Oh, yes. Oh ah, after work, yes. Of course. I mean, you know, you'd ah, you know if you're working twelve hours, you know, especially in the summer, you know, you'd want a couple of beers after work. You know, and maybe two or three. One of the ah, and actually you may know him, um, ah, Tommy Collie, he just died a couple of years ago, I think he was from ah, Tommy was from Ireland. I want to say Cavan. I may be wrong on that.

BH: No.

JK: But ah, Tommy was an iron worker. In fact, he used to work with my dad. And Tommy then got into the bar business at one point and ah, years ago he had, I think it was one of the first places he had, now has the classic sign "Stop and Drink".

BH: Uhmmm.

JK: It's on Chicago Avenue and Clark, just South there . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: in fact, now the place has changed hands, but they kept the, the sign, because I think it's now landmarked, the sign itself. But, but Tommy ended up, he ended up getting into the bar business, and real estate, in fact he had The Emerald Isle . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: which is a great place for live music, right down in ah, was it, there was a couple of iterations, one was on Rush Street and then ah, I think the longest one was on, I think, Pearson and State?

BH: Uh huh.

JK: Right next to Loyola and across from Quigley North?

BH: Yep.

JK: You know the lovely church there?

BH: Yep.

JK: So Tom, Tommy was a, Tommy was there and had that place for years. But then he had gotten into real estate so he was, you know, buying units, apartment units and stuff like that. Then he started doing high rises and then he passed away. But ah, so he had this place the Stop and Drink and ah, when we were working on that ah, that first job we worked on, after work we'd stop in there and it had changed hands for awhile, but ah, the back door was to a, probably shouldn't be saying this, there used to be a police station on ah Chicago Avenue, right across from the Moody Bible Institute?

BH: Yeah, I know right were . . .

JK: Well the back door of it entered into the back door of Stop and Drink.

BH: Laughter.

JK: So we'd stop in there and you know, we'd park over by the Moody Bible Institute because it was you know, it was free parking. There wasn't any meters. You know, if you were driving downtown, you know, you always want to look for cheap or free parking.

BH: Yeah, I always . . .

JK: Because if you're there for twelve hours, you don't want to pay \$30 a day, or \$40. So, I remember one time [laughs] stopping in, myself and Jimmy the Horse, we stopped in there and a few other guys from work, and I think it was one of the first times they had gone in there, and they had Jack Brickhouse . . . they had two TVs, it was a long oval bar, there were two TVs and one, one side of the, the, the bar was Jack Brickhouse announcing the Cubs game on that afternoon. On the other TV, there was you know, the back was facing the door going in, was porn with the sound off . . . [laughter] So you had Jack Brickhouse calling the game with porn on this side.

BH: Laughter.

JK: And you'd look at the ceiling and there bullet holes every place cause you know, the cops would get off work and they would want to, you know,

BH: Yeah.

JK: They'd want to raise a bit of hell. So it was one of the most surreal places ever.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, this is me, you know, it was a couple of years out of high school, I said

“Wow.”

BH: Wow.

JK: You know but after twelve hours a day, a couple of hours in the bar, it's, you know.

1:02:00

BH: I see. Yeah. Were there a lot of Irish iron workers in, from what you're saying . . .

JK: Oh, there were, yeah. Oh, when I was, I'd say there was probably, I'm guessing now when I started there was probably say 24 or 2500 iron workers and I'd say easily there were 700 that were Irish.

BH: Yeah.

JK: I mean direct Irish. Never mind then, you know I'd be considered an Irish American, my brother . . . and all the sons of the iron workers that had been working since the '60s, a lot of their kids, either worked the summer or they became iron workers themselves. Yeah. But there were a lot, there was a huge, and again, most of them, I'd say 90% of them worked reinforcing all of the time.

BH: Wow. And, so did they come in as, just because there was, ah, so many of the Irish in construction business . . .

JK: I think so that was the easiest entrance in. Because you know if you didn't, you know, if you, a lot of them came in from Canada in the '60s and, you know, if you, no one, I mean my dad went to basically 6th grade.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And so, what are you going to do? Even then, you know, I mean you'd make good money.

BH: Yeah.

JK: And a lot of them, they started out as iron workers, a lot of them got into the gas company or maybe moved into different trades. A lot of them went from iron worker to the gas company.

BH: Yeah. Well that's interesting.

JK: 'Cause I had an uncle who worked for years as an iron worker then he got the opportunity to go into the People's Gas, so he went with People's Gas, you know.

BH: Yeah. In what kind of job?

JK: He ended up being the retiring superintendent for People's Gas. You know, so he started out digging ditches. You know, so you either work on rebar or shovels, one of the two.

BH: Laughs. Yeah.

JK: In fact, there's still, there's still a lot of the, most of them are retired. I'd say there's probably, I must ask my brother, I should ask my brother, Dennis. There's still a handful of Irish guys that came out in the, you know as far as the, a lot, there was a resurgence in the '80s, when a lot of Irish immigrants came out. So a lot of those younger guys are still working iron now. But all the ones, most of the ones my dad worked with, they're either retired or they've passed on.

BH: Yeah. Do you think that the economic vitality of Ireland, I mean not right now, but for several years, it seemed to be doing really well, do you think that that diminished the immigrants coming into Chicago and keeping that Irish, maybe the Irish music scene, but also Irish in the construction business, did that go down then do you think?

JK: Well, actually, you oddly, I think it's, I've always heard it was, you know, it went back to, you know, the early '60s with Kennedy, when he was worried about the brain drain of Ireland.

BH: Yeah.

JK: So it made immigration, I mean basically immigration cut-off at '64 or '65.

BH: Really?

JK: Yeah. So it became much harder to get here.

BH: Oh, interesting.

JK: To the states, you know.

BH: Interesting.

JK: You could double check that, but it's . . .

BH: Yeah. So that's got to have, I mean, a detrimental impact in some ways or do you think there's still a big back and forth here in Chicago?

JK: Oh, within the trades specifically or just in general?

BH: Just in general.

JK: Well, yeah, there's actually, again like the late '90s when they initiated the J1 Visa.

There a lot of, you know, young Irish that came out,

BH: Yeah.

JK: and you know, they've eventually got their green cards and then a lot of them became citizens, but then they weren't in the trades then, because they were far better educated. You know there were a handful that came out and that became homebuilders, you know, that were carpenters.

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know, that were carpenters.

BH: Yeah.

JK: and ah, lesser probably coming into the trades. I know a bunch of young guys that came out, now they're ah, they're, they're for software companies. They're working for Google, they're working for Groupon, they're working for you know, the new, the new economy.

BH: Yeah. They don't have to come in as construction workers . . .

JK: No.

BH: They're well educated now, yeah.

JK: Yeah. I'm not saying that they weren't well educated, I mean you know, put it this way, they had degrees . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: and I'd say that, you know, most of the iron workers I knew, I mean, you know, they were as intelligent as anyone else, with common sense and you know as you mentioned problem solving and all that stuff. Just because they didn't have a pig skin . . .

BH: Yeah, didn't mean anything.

JK: Didn't mean anything, you know. Some of them were the most, some of the most ferocious readers . . .

BH: Yeah.

JK: You know. All did different, they were half of them musicians. You know, as I mentioned Kevin Henry, you know. There were others because they were different trades, but a lot them, a lot of the other Irish musicians became stationary engineers here.

BH: Oh.

JK: Castle Island, they became, at the time they were know as Castle Island engineers because there was the, I think it was the Reidy's. One of the earlier presidents of the local {Local 399 of the International Operating Engineers}. So there was a bunch of Irish guys from Kerry, primarily. Castle Island . . . remember Costainn [?], the concertina player? Terry Costain?

BH: No.

JK: He's a great composer here. He's from Castle Island, but, so there were a lot of, so they were called the Castle Island engineers.

BH: Oh interesting.

JK: 'Cause they were from Kerry, but they were stationary engineers.

BH: Yeah.

JK: There's are a couple that are still working now, I think, couple are still working as stationary engineers for the city. You know and they're about ready to retire.

BH: Yeah. Well hey, I, I'm ah, I got what I needed here. This was great. I want to thank you for coming over.

JK: I went all over the place.

BH: Well, that's what it was supposed to be. That's what I wanted it to be.

JK: All right.

BH: So it was really a pleasure. Always good to talk to you Jimmy.

JK: My pleasure as well.

BH: Thanks.

END: 1:08:45