

Kenneth (Kenny) Cohen interviewed by Jaime Lopez and Barrie Cline

Jaime : You've known about this stuff for quite a while now

Kenny: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jaime: I think you got the low down on the project.

Kenny: Yes.

Jaime: We're going to get you to sign the release form afterwards.

Kenny: Okay.

Jaime: Don't let us forget that. You already know the jist of it and you've graciously welcomed your sister and also your father will join us in this process [crosstalk 00:00:23].

Kenny: Thank you, guys, for allowing us all to participate.

Jaime: Cool. We're just going to go through some of the questions. You can start off [00:00:30] by telling us your, name, your job title, and where you currently live.

Kenny: Okay. My name is Kenneth Cohen. I guess Kenny Cohen. I'm a journeyman. I was initiated into Local Three in 2009. I guess that means I've been for about eight years, eight years in September.

Jaime: Eight years and ...

Kenny: I'm sorry. I live in Flushing, Flushing, New York.

Jaime: What's your background? Where were you born and where are you parents [00:01:00] from?

Kenny: I am born and raised in Flushing, Queens. My dad..I actually grew up in the same neighborhood my father grew up in. My mother is from California. Actually, I guess I have this industry to thank for my existence because my father met my mother while he was traveling as an electrician and he was working out in the Bay Area in San Jose and that's how they ended up meeting while he was [00:01:30] working out there.

Jaime: Can you tell us a little bit about your job now, your types of work that you've been doing, and where you're working now?

Kenny: I most recently have been working with Wade Electric which is kind of cool because it's also the first shop that I worked in as a TA1 apprentice. It [00:02:00] was kind of cool to be reintroduced to some of my first journeymen as their peer as a fellow journeyman so that was cool. They still do a lot of the laboratory buildings and hospitals.

The first job I was on with them was the science park over on 33rd and 1st Avenue and I think they call it the Alexandria. [00:02:30] Then the most recent job I was at with them were as a new laboratory for Memorial Sloan Kettering. In addition to that, I did a lot of DP work with them as well so galvanized pipe and control wiring and stuff like that.

Jaime: You said that you were a first-year apprentice with them?

Kenny: Yes.

Jaime: You went through your apprenticeship. You left the company and then you revisited [crosstalk 00:02:53].

Kenny: Ended up getting back thought that shop. It was a kind of cool. It was interesting to see how many people still [00:03:00] remember me after all that time.

Jaime: How did they receive you?

Kenny: Pretty well actually. I get along with everybody. I got along with all the guys I used to work with before, and then a few of us follow each other on Facebook. We semi-kept in touch over the years, so it was cool to have that warm welcome when I got back with the shop.

Barrie: Can you take us back to that first day that you worked there?

Kenny: My first day of work was [00:03:30] nervous. It was very a lot of nerves flowing. When I decided I was going to enter this business, I really didn't know what to expect. I avoided it for a long time primarily because I didn't understand this line of work as a way to be successful not [00:04:00] because I didn't see it through my father or anything but just because of what I had accepted from peers and just, I guess, the rest of society. I was under the impression that the only way to be successful was to go to college and get what people accept as a socially acceptable and prosperous career. Not only that, I didn't know anything about electrical work or construction period. [00:04:30] I was always used to learning quickly and knowing pretty much everything before I actually had to do it so this is totally left for me.

I think the first day of work, I might have almost cut my finger off twice just trying to keep up. It's like you ... I don't know. Maybe it's a macho thing on a construction site or something, but you don't want [00:05:00] to seem like you're not following and not able to keep up with the work pace.

I remember a journeyman had asked me ... I watched him cut a conduit with a bandsaw, and I watched him do it all day. Finally, at the end of the day, he's like, "Do you feel comfortable enough to go cut six inches off this piece of pipe for me?" I said, "Yes, I got it. No problem." I go to the bandsaw and I was watching everything but how he held the bandsaw. [00:05:30] I'm holding the bandsaw. I have gloves on. I have the part with the trigger on one hand, and then I'm holding where the blade rotates in the other hand. As I'm cutting the pipe, it was three quarters so it's small. It doesn't take long to cut through it. As I'm cutting, I feel something rubbing against my glove, and I'm like, "Wow. What is that?" Finally, when I finished cutting through the pipe, I see a slice through my gloves. It didn't break skin or anything but I'm like, "Damn. Maybe I did need a little ... Maybe I did need a little [00:06:00] more assistance before."

Once classes started and they started to stress the importance of safety and everything and I started to meet other apprentice who knew just as little as me, it made me a little more comfortable not knowing. I haven't almost cut my finger off since that.

Jaime: Kenny, what changed your mind about the electrical industry and how did you become an electrician?

Kenny: In all honesty, I became an electrician because my mother [00:06:30] filled out the application for me, forced me to go and take the test, and told me if I do not do well on the test that I'm kicked out of the house. It's weird though because I remember being a kid every kid wants to be like their father when they are a kid. I did want to be an electrician at some point in life. I guess those other influences blocked those memories of wanting to be like [00:07:00] my dad. I guess once I got into the business and realized that you can still do everything that you have a passion for and be a great electrician and be a great union person at the same time, and that there are avenues that help you and embrace you in those other things that you like to do in life. That's when I really started to understand the dimensions of this [00:07:30] industry.

Barrie: Can you flesh those out for us a little bit like what are some of the ... when you said everything you always wanted to do or the dimension that you're talking about?

Kenny: Prior to coming in to Local Three, I was very into community organizing and activist work and just being a voice for other people. I guess I felt when I started this that I couldn't do that anymore. I guess maybe [00:08:00] that meant I had to quit those to start something, a new industry. Then one of the biggest things that they ask you to do is to be an advocate for other workers whether it's going to a rally to support another union that's on strike, some legislation that has to be passed. A lot of times members' families will get sick and we donate money to help with [00:08:30] their care or just the overall well-being of the family.

A lot of the community service work that we do that's all things that I had a passion for doing before I got into this industry. I did not know that we were so

involved in that type advocacy and just overall community help. Had I known that, I might have tried to get in a little earlier [00:09:00] sooner. Even a lot of my friends, they use the security that they have financially from working in this industry to start businesses of their own outside of the electrical industry.

There's one girl, one of our sisters has her own swimwear line. From what I understand, she is doing very well. I know guys who get into real estate. I know people who've owned clubs. [00:09:30] These are all things I'm sure they've always had aspirations of doing. The financial security of this allows them to actually do it and pursue some of those dreams.

Barrie: And time, sometimes, right?

Kenny: Yes, right.

Jaime: Kenny, do you have any family in the business?

Kenny: I do. My father is a retired Local 3 member, and my sister is currently an apprentice. At least in the second-generation Local Three person and the third-generation union member. Both my grandfathers were [00:10:00] teamsters.

Barrie: I didn't know that.

Jaime: What do you like about this job and some of your current jobs?

Kenny: There's a lot to like. I'll try to pinpoint. I like that everything... no day is ever the same. [00:10:30] I guess that pretty much sums it up. It's like you can put an outlet on a wall every day and something's going to be different about putting that outlet in I'm each day whether it's the crew that you're doing it with, the shop that you're doing it for, the location in the city that you're doing it, the function that that switch is going to perform. [00:11:00] There's always going to be something different and I think that keeps it exciting.

At this point, I don't imagine being a person who goes to the same job every single day and sits behind the same desk every single day. I think I'd lose my mind doing something like that. I've worked in every single part of the city in all five boroughs. I remember as an MIJ on the van. I [00:11:30] couldn't go on certain highways, so I had to make sure I knew how to get around certain boroughs without getting all the parkways and things like that. I felt like I was turning into my dad because my dad always knew how to avoid traffic. We'd cruise through some streets. I don't know if took longer or shorter, but we never had to sit in traffic and we got to the endpoint. I found myself doing the same thing. [00:12:00] It's cool. It allows you to see your city. It allows you to help build the city. Its like every time I take my girl somewhere or take my friends somewhere, "I worked on the building." It gives you a different appreciation for the city that you live in knowing that you're building it.

Jaime: Kenny, can you explain a little bit about your learning process at work and through your partnership?

Kenny: I think [00:12:30] the process of an apprenticeship is one of the most amazing learning experiences. I dabbled in education with kids before I got in the Local 3. One of the things that I understood is that when people are learning, they learn in various ways. One of the problems with kids being able to retain information is that the school system oftentimes doesn't [00:13:00] tap into all those different ways that people need to receive knowledge. What's so great about the apprenticeship is that regardless of what type of learner you are when you're learning a task like there's going to be something ... There's going to be a method of teaching that you receive that will allow you to comprehend that. You're sitting in school getting the theory, so a lot of the times that's the audio. For people that are audio learners, they're learning [00:13:30] the trade that way. For people who need to be hands on, you're learning it on the job from another journey person.

If you're better at writing things down, you're taking notes in class or ... I knew dudes who kept notebooks and pads while on the job and they jot down notes either or take pictures as journey people are showing them how to do things. I saw a lot of guys looking back at those pictures and stuff in their notes trying to figure out how they did that conduit run or something. [00:14:00] It's a very unique experience, and not only that, the bonds that you create in this process.

The generation that comes before you is completely responsible for making sure that this industry continues on because they're responsible for teaching the generation that's coming up after them. Not only are they responsible for teaching it to them, they're responsible [00:14:30] for making them proficient and making them comfortable enough to teach the generation that's coming after them. If somewhere there's a breakdown in that teaching, then the industry dies. It's as important for the person who's learning to receive that information or respect the teacher as it is for the teacher to understand the importance of passing it on and respect the student. It's a very interesting [00:15:00] learning dynamic because there's that respect thing. There's is always a respect of student and respect of the teacher is also ...

Barrie: [crosstalk 00:15:10] people don't necessarily like each other but if there is that respect...

Kenny: Yes. One of the hardest parts about this business people always say is not the work that we do, but it's dealing with all the different personalities you come across. It's very humbling a lot of times. You may not like a person, but in order [00:15:30] to get the job done, you have to be best friends for that... until that job is done. You may hate each other at the parking lot or on the train on the way home, but while you're doing that job, you got to be best friends. Not only that, you're life depends on it too.

Barrie: That's an interesting skillset to have.

Jaime: Kenny, how do you find yourself learning these days? What makes it easy for you to learn nowadays?

Kenny: Honestly, as a young journey person, there's still a lot that I don't know. [00:16:00] Recently, I haven't been given a partner a lot so having to figure things out has been a very interesting way of learning. I didn't do too much pipe bending with the hand bender. Last task that I was given, my foreman gave me a few bundles of pipe and a bender and said, "I need you to do all the emergency lights on these floors." [00:16:30] You can't tell your foreman you're not too sure, so you just have to figure it out. It ended up turning out beautiful. It got done in a timeframe where he was very pleased. That's a skill that I was able to kind of work on a little bit and perfect a little bit that I wasn't too sure with. Also being assigned an apprentice and having to teach them.

[00:17:00] It's like, for me, I've always retained information better by teaching somebody else. I get the knowledge and then give that knowledge to someone else. It's been awesome having apprentices and being able to share the little bit that I've learned throughout the years to help them but also help myself.

Barrie: Some of the work felt particularly creative in nature?

Kenny: Again, I feel like everything we do is created in nature and I get a feeling [00:17:30] of everything we do in creative and artistic. The amount of time and detail we put into what we do is something very special. When you can see and exposed pipe run and see all the bends bending together and everything just flows; that's an art. [00:18:00] Some people outside of the industry can look up and appreciate it and recognize it; a lot of people don't but even with traditional art a lot of people look at it and think it's amazing and other people don't get it.

I remember when I was a first-year apprentice with Wade Electric. I was working with an MIJ and it was just me and him. We wired up an entire room for lighting, [00:18:30] and it was time for us to turn the breaker on to turn the lights on to see if they all work and it was awesome is almost like a ... It was like a like the movies. When you turn the power on and it goes joosh! That sound happen and all the lights turned on. It almost was like watching a light show for the Kosciuszko Bridge or something like, "That was my light [00:19:00] show because ..." We did the work to put it on and it came on. That was my first time turning on power- or I didn't turn the power he turned the power on- and watching our work actually work so it was cool.

Jaime: You're telling me that special feeling attached to that.

Kenny: Yeah.

Jaime: Can you express that feeling? Can you express what it feels like when you turn that on or when it comes to completion .. all that hard work?

Kenny: I don't know about [00:19:30] anybody else but I just get like, "Wow, I did that" type of feeling. I'm around babies all the time. I have a nephew. I watch my niece grow up. When you see them constantly trying to conquer something whether it's standing up or taking their first few steps and that excitement that they have, a kid making their first basket into the hoop, and they keep trying over and over and they're doing all the work to make it happen and it finally happens and they get so excited. [00:20:00] I guess the same feeling I get every time I complete a task because you put a lot of work and energy and planning into the what you do.

When you finish that task and you see it through, it's a, "Wow. I did that" type of feeling. I don't know. I get goosebumps sometimes but I get really attached to do what I do.

Barrie: [00:20:30] That's cool.

Jaime: We're you ever scared of that work or scared of any tool or any specific for scheduling tool or a specific job location.

Kenny: Obviously, I used to be scared of band saws but ... I don't know. It's like I feel like when I'm at work there's like a professional adrenaline that takes place because typically, I'm afraid of heights. At work, I'm not afraid of heights. I'll [00:21:00] put my harness on and I'll climb off the lift and get on a rack of pipes and start moving around. I don't do that outside of work, hell no. [crosstalk 00:21:11].

Jaime: That's an interesting way of phrasing it. It was professional adrenaline.

Kenny: Yes. I don't know. This is very ... I guess it's like you ... I guess that goes back to that macho thing. It's like you can't really be afraid to do something especially if no one is asking you to do anything that's unsafe. [00:21:30] I've gotten over being nervous about saying I don't know how to do some things. As long as you're willing to show me how to do it, then there is no reason why I can't complete it or at least try it. You know what? I'm sorry. In that thinking, I was on a job one time. I was an MIJ. I was working with Stanco Electric and they had a job at Chelsea Piers.

[00:22:00] When the ships dock, they're hooked up to a power supply. That shop was responsible for all the feeders that feed a lot of those ships while they're docked. A lot of those disconnects were on the pier, and they ran a little bit of exposed pipe but it's mostly this marine cable, a heavy like ridiculously ... I don't know why it's so heavy cable. [00:22:30] You feed that, it goes to the ship. Obviously, piers are in the water. I don't swim and they had this rickety ass like a raft thing only big enough for one person. The journeyman thought I was going to get on that raft. I was like, "I don't get in the water on vacation. I'm definitely not getting in the water for you right now." I [00:23:00] do not swim and that was the Hudson River so who knows where I would have ended up if I fell off that. I'll don't care if you would have given me a life jacket or not. I was scared. I

was not doing it. I'll be the top guy. I was pulling that heavy ass Marine cable back and forth by myself, but I was not getting on that little rickety raft. Nope.

Jaime: Very good, Kenny. You opted out of the marine cable [crosstalk 00:23:30].

Kenny: I [00:23:30] have opted out of the little rickety raft. No. Marine cable, I'll do that. I got you, but that raft, no. No, thank you.

Jaime: You said no raft?

Kenny: No.

Jaime: What work do you excel at or feel most comfortable doing?

Kenny: I don't know. I guess I've always liked doing large pipe. I guess maybe because it's one of the first big things that I worked on with a journey person. [00:24:00] We did a set of 15 pipes. I think it was 3-1/2-inch EMT and there was a big section that the tenant didn't like how it was exposed, so we demoed the pipe that was there. We were responsible for running it the way they wanted it rerouted. I got a [00:24:30] lot of practice using a table bender, using a protractor, and no dogs, and things like that. I guess it's kind of been a reoccurring thing throughout my apprenticeship and my early journeyman years. I guess I just got a liking for it doing the big pipe and pulling wire.

Barrie: How big is it?

Kenny: The biggest I've worked with has been 5-inch galvanized [00:25:00] so it was pretty big. Once you get to 4-inch [gowl 00:25:05] one stick weighs 120 pounds. That's a 10-foot stick. It gets heavy but a lot of people don't like it. It's a little harder to deal with but I enjoy; it's therapeutic. The bigger the pipe, the shorter the day feels. [00:25:30] Once you put up a few of those sticks of 4-inch, it's like, "Wow. Where did time go?" It eats time really quick.

Jaime: You usually work with a partner.

Kenny: Yes, absolutely.

Jaime: Can you describe the relationship between you and your partner when you're working on some of this heavier conduit runs or with this heavy equipment?

Kenny: When you're working on heavy equipment with a partner, you definitely have to trust each other. [00:26:00] You really can't ...not much room for bullshit because the heavier the equipment, the easier it is to get hurt. If you move too fast or if you move too slow or you're not moving together, it's very easy for a mistake to happen. You have to make sure you have the ability to communicate and I guess read the other person because at the same ... Once again working with heavier [00:26:30] equipment is a lot more strain on the body. If your

partner is not doing too good, you have to know that because if you're trying to lift a piece of pipe up into the air and I'm not fully up to it or he's not fully up to it, that could cause the other person to get hurt. Just being able to communicate and then trust that person that you're working with or develop a trust for that person you're working with this is really important.

Jaime: When I'm thinking about what you're telling me, there's a certain type of code [00:27:00] language that you may use or signaling. Can you explain some of that type of communication? When you say communication... with that relationship, is there anything you recall like specifically the words you used to say to each other or how you used to do things?

Kenny: Only thing that's coming to mind right now is a lot of counting.

[crosstalk 00:27:22].

Kenny: It's like if we're getting ready to lift up a piece of pipe. I guess though the rule of the industry is that if you're going to lift up [00:27:30] something either over a certain amount of weight or in this example, a piece of 4-inch [gowl 00:27:35], there's supposed to be two men to a piece of pipe or two people, we'll bend down and one, two, three up and then that's the cue for everybody to lift so that I'm not lifting before you are maybe throwing my back out or you want to have an even load. There's things that ... You just want to make sure that you're communicating the work [00:28:00] together not against each other. I think it's when you're rigging your stuff like that. You have the hand signals and things like that but ...

Barrie: What's rigging?

Kenny: When you're moving heavy equipment with machines, cranes, and things like that.

Barrie: Okay.

Kenny: Other than that, a lot counting and just making sure you have each other's back when you're moving with things.

Barrie: Can you give a couple [00:28:30] of other examples since the public might get a chance to hear this at some point?

Jaime: Right, because when you say rigging, the person that may be listening to this may not know anything about [inaudible 00:28:45] electrical work. Would you describe something? Maybe get a little more detail so somebody who's not an electrician can try to understand, some can grasp some of the information.

Barrie: The thing I wanted to ask [00:29:00] you was if you could give me a couple of other examples when you said that we have to communicate with each other so

that don't get hurt and obviously lifting is part of it. What are some of the other things that come to mind right away that you could really get hurt?

Kenny: We're in the field of electricity.

Barrie: Right...

Kenny: You definitely want to be careful just in general when working with electricity because it's a quiet force that [00:29:30] packs a lot of power.

Barrie: With a partner when you're saying you're doing... [crosstalk 00:29:36]?

Kenny: Right. A lot of times you'll be troubleshooting circuits, making sure to find out maybe why a circuit may not be working. In that troubleshooting process, you may flash the circuits at the panel. It's important for the person [00:30:00] who's on the panel.. and to say that their turning the power on. The person at the other end of it if the receptacle or whatever the end line may be, to let them know that they're clear before they test so that everybody knows what's going on. You don't want to be caught off guard that there's power being turned on and somebody [00:30:30] may get hurt because they don't know the power is coming on.

Jaime: Kenny, has somebody ever passed down a tool to you or have you ever passed down a tool to somebody else?

Kenny: When I first started, my dad gave me a lot of his old tools. Luckily for me, I did not have to buy too many tools. Actually, my first foreman was like, "You must have a family in the business [00:31:00] because those aren't new pliers." Actually, I think the pliers that my dad gave me were blown out which means that there was a hole in the middle of the cutting part of it. I got very good at using subpar tools, so when I did start getting new tools, I was aces of dynamite with it. Every apprentice should start over subpar tools.

Jaime: [00:31:30] I think you're just making yourself feel good there..(all laughing)

Kenny: Yes. My sister came in a little bit later. Since there were no more used tools to give her, I felt it was my responsibility to buy her first set of tools. We met up in the city one day and I took her to one of the [00:32:00] supply houses that were offering the, I guess, apprentice rate for new tools, and I bought her first tool set. It was a special feeling to be able to give her. I guess it continued that family tradition sort of that we have had. I got a really cool pair of pliers from a journey woman at one time. [Cheryl Fowler 00:32:23] gave me a pair of, I guess, [00:32:30] army fatigue. I think it was for the support the troops that Klein had made. I don't take those to work. I got to leave them at home because I'd have to whoop somebody if they try to take my pliers away. I don't know.

Jaime: She handed those down to you?

Kenny: Yes. I think she got me and [Fox 00:32:50] a pair.

Jaime: How does that feel to receive something like that?

Kenny: It's special because the bare minimum that anyone has to do for you [00:33:00] is tolerate you on the job. Anything beyond that is sort of ...that person feels enough for you that they're willing to offer an extra gesture towards you. That makes you feel special in anything whether you're inside this industry or outside of it. Because part of the way that we show love to each other [00:33:30] in this industry is either through teasing each other or passing something down or giving gifts. When you do receive something, it makes you feel very special because you know it's coming from a very special place from that person. It makes you appreciate a lot of things when received love from somebody else in this industry because they don't have to give you anything.

Jaime: Kenny, you spoke [00:34:00] a little bit about tradition. What's your favorite Local 3 tradition?

Kenny: My favorite Local Three tradition? Aside from the passing of knowledge, I think I have two. The process of carding is something that I feel is a very special tradition. What carding is is a way to identify another Local 3 union member by showing each other your union [00:34:30] card. I guess is just a real fraternal type of gesture to me. It's like I went to college for a little bit. You would see the fraternities have their little special handshakes and stuff. That was their way of identifying each other. Masons have special ways of identifying themselves to each other. That process of carding I feel is a very important and special tradition that we [00:35:00] have there. We really need to make sure we keep up.

We have the Time Warner strike going on right now. Prior to that, any Time Warner worker that would come to either my parents' house or now my apartment, I would card them. Unless they had their union card, they were not allowed to do any work in our home. There was one time there was a gentleman who showed up. He didn't have his union card on [00:35:30] him. He was in the union but he didn't have his card on him. He didn't understand why I would refuse his service. I had to explain it to him. I don't know. I'm hoping now maybe that they're on strike... I mean it's unfortunate they are on strike, but I'm hoping he understands that process of carding now, because now there are people who are not Local 3 that are still doing the work [00:36:00] that our brothers and sisters should be doing. Until they're off strike, I don't care what kind of the cable problems we're having, they're not coming into my house. No card, no work here.

I remember one time I was working at [Two Penn 00:36:14]. Somebody asked me if I was Local Three. I said yes. He's like, "Let me see your union card." I was like, "You must not be Local 3 because you know if you want to see mine, you have to show me yours." He's like, "Good job," so I still don't know if he was

Local 3 or not but he didn't see [00:36:30] my union card. He didn't produce one so I don't know.

Barrie: Can you say a little bit more? You've already said some but maybe even more though about what it means to you to be a union member.

Kenny: Well, one of the things that made me appreciate carding, I was a third-year apprentice and I was working at the train station over Barclay. [00:37:00] We got our new union cards and I didn't bring mine because I wanted to make sure mine was always in pristine shape. I hated putting it in my wallet because for some reason our union cards are not cut to a size that fit in any standard wallet.

Jaime: Is that a formal complaint (laughing)?

Kenny: It's an unofficial complaint. I thought I was doing the right thing by leaving it at home and only taking it to my union meetings so I can get it scanned [00:37:30] so I can keep it nice and crisp. My steward came and asked to see my new union card. I told him I didn't have it. He broke it down to me in a way that made me appreciate, I guess, what unions mean to workers. He pretty much said, "Once you sign the back of that union card, [00:38:00] you assume the responsibility that you believe in the process of collective bargaining and that you are an advocate for the rights of workers in any industry." No one had ever broken it down to me like that before. You always hear carrying a union card with pride, but why are you carrying your union card with pride? That's the way of you of identifying yourself as a person who believes that all workers deserve [00:38:30] an opportunity or a seat at the table with their employer.

Once I realized that, that's really what unionism stands for... I've made sure I always have my union card with me. Then too...it just put it a little more in to perspective. It really drove me home that we are advocates whether we choose to go union meetings or not, whether we choose to participate [00:39:00] in a lot of the extracurricular things. The process of being in a union by default makes you an advocate for workers who do not have a voice.

Jaime: Kenny, did you mention another tradition? I heard you said two.

Kenny: Yes.

Jaime: Is there something else?

Kenny: Yes. The other tradition when you progress in the industry [00:39:30] you get different classifications. You receive different cards. I had the opportunity because my father was the generation before me. He handed me my A card when I've completed the apprenticeship. To me, that's a very special tradition because it's just the way of seeing the generations within the industry. Now that the [00:40:00] industry is coming out of that father-son mold, seeing my friends receive their cards from people who mentored them in the industry and now

seeing my friends give their cards to people that they've mentored is a very special tradition just because I feel it and continues that sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that I think is really important within this industry.

Barrie: [00:40:30] Can you say a little bit more about the mentoring component of the union?

Kenny: Mentoring has always been something that this industry has had, and I guess we've evolved it a little bit by creating a legit mentoring program. I came in for the program before there was a mentoring program, [00:41:00] but I've got tons of people who saw something special or something that they liked about me and wanted to help steer me in the right direction. I was fortunate to have that. Unfortunately, not everybody gets that opportunity or whether it's because they're not seeking it. A lot a lot of my classmates ended up in places where that really wasn't something [00:41:30] available to them. Now, we have this mentoring program where you're assigned a mentor who is a journey person in the industry and you're able to bounce any concerns or anything really off of them whether it's about work, life, volunteering. I really think it's helping to welcome [00:42:00] people who aren't from the father-son mold into the industry.

Barrie: So it's moved away a bit from the father and son mold?

Kenny: Yes. It's like most of the people that I've interacted with in this industry so far especially like apprentices and people I went to the program with are first-generation Local 3 people. When my dad came in, most [00:42:30] of the people he went through the program with already had family in the business. That's a large time gap but you could see that there's a switch in the people that are becoming interested in the business and the people that are going through the program in order to fully welcome them in. You have to change up a little bit [00:43:00] how you welcome them in. Yes, I definitely think that mentoring is a very important component of our industry.

Jaime: Kenny, what are your aspirations as an electrician?

Kenny: My aspiration as an electrician? I don't know. It sounds very fantasy but I think if you're really a good electrician and a good union person, [00:43:30] you want to see the society get to a point where everybody's working all the time. Obviously, construction has ups and downs. You have periods of layoff and furlough and unemployment. You have times where work is booming. I think ... I don't know. I guess I just want to do whatever it is that is called upon me to do or that feels right to [00:44:00] make sure that we do our part to make sure that union starts to get more say within society, I guess working with people in general to get more say within society so that there's more work opportunity for everyone.

I think my goal as an electrician is to work. That's ultimately what we want to do. We want to feed our families. We want to live a quality lifestyle. [00:44:30] You do that by working hard. Whatever it is that I have to do to make sure that we all have that opportunities is my goal.

Barrie: If you could change something about your work, what would it be?

Kenny: If I could change something about my work ... I don't [00:45:00] know. That's a curveball question. I had to think about that. It's a curveball.

Jaime: For me, I like to wake up a little bit later. Just saying, I don't like waking up early.

Kenny: Yes, that....

Jaime: I'm getting used to it, I guess but ...

Kenny: I don't think I'm ever going to get used to waking up early but ... I remember watching my dad wake up every single morning.

Barrie: [00:45:30] What time?

Kenny: He was always early to work, so I know he would ... I'm like that person that's right on time where it's like ... I know guys who get in to the [shanty 00:45:43] six o'clock and we don't start working until seven. That means they missed out on a whole lot sleep. I'm that guy ...

[crosstalk 00:45:52]

Kenny: A lot of people get into their routine. It's like that's the guy who wants to go get his coffee. He brings his breakfast. He has his paper. [00:46:00] He wants to sit there and flip through it and read it. He wants to be comfortable before he starts working which is cool. Maybe when I get old, I want to do that too. I still stay up late and watch TV. I still go out from time to time. As long as I'm there 15 minutes before seven, actually my goal is to get there by quarter to seven. If I do that, then I'm completely fine with that. [00:46:30] If I could change something ...

Jaime: Think about it. If anything comes up, you could throw it at us. Have you ever been complimented at work about something that you did on the job or did any work that felt particularly meaningful?

Kenny: I think that's every day. It's like I think we should all... Every component of the jobs that we do has a purpose. It's like I learned that as an apprentice just [00:47:00] because you're organizing material or you're getting coffee, it doesn't mean that's an insignificant job. If you ask the right questions, you're going to find out what the purpose of that job is and why it's important to the grand scheme of the project that you all are working on. Anything that I complete, I

feel is special. [00:47:30] Last time I did some pipe work, I got complimented on it which was extra special because I was refreshing myself and teaching myself new things as I went along. It was good to receive those compliments. Unfortunately, I recently got laid off from Wade. In the process of talking to my foreman, he let me know that everything I worked on turned out nicely. There were no errors or flaws [00:48:00] in what I did. It was good to know that part of me is going to forever be in that building. Nobody had to do any changes to it so that's all me. That's me right there. That was a good feeling.

Jaime: It's pretty neat right there when you're saying as you go through the city, you're leaving parts of you.

Kenny: Yes. There used [00:48:30] to be a tradition where journeymen will write their name on whether it's a pipe run or may be in a panel that they laced in, they'd leave their signature or their marks somewhere on a piece of work that they did. My boy Mark who I was working with at this last shop, he did some beautiful panels. He shaped them in, put all the braided circuits in, and everything was beautiful. He signed his name and all of the ones that he completed. [00:49:00] His work in itself was him leaving a piece but he signed it as well just in case anybody else wanted to admire it too. They knew who did that. They knew Mark was there.

Barrie: That's cool.

Kenny: I don't think I've ever signed anything but maybe I'll start.

Jaime: In the future, do you think that your children or members of your community are going to want to do the same kind of [00:49:30] work or will be doing the same kind of work?

Kenny: I hope so. I do think one of the great things about this business is the ability to pass it on to the next generation within your family. Obviously, I think it's great to have all a whole lot of people that are new to this industry coming in because hopefully, it creates an opportunity for them to start a family tradition. I don't [00:50:00] know. I guess maybe I feel like I appreciate it a little bit more because I am familiar with it from my childhood. I hope that some of the younger generations of my family aspire to go into this business. I hope that me, my sister, and my father do a good job of expressing how great of an opportunity [00:50:30] this is. I do hope that members of my community are able to take advantage of this.

One of the things that I feel isn't spoken about enough in schools is the opportunity to join apprentice programs. I got sucked inside a trap where you have to go to college in order to have a good career, make a lot of money. I went to St. John's and I was like \$15,000 [00:51:00] in debt off of two semesters. All those dudes I was hanging out with that were saying "you don't want to be an electrician" now have like 100 grand in debt are asking me how did I get into

Local 3 now. It's like I might be \$15,000 richer had I not listened to them back them and came in a little earlier. Who knows?

Barrie: It is a path that is more available than [00:51:30] people know?

Kenny: I don't know if it's more available than people know but not enough people know that it's available, I feel. Because even if you know about it and you know to apply, it's still a competitive application process. I think we get something like 10,000 applicants and we may be only accept like a few thousand people into the program through each application wave so it's competitive. It's as competitive as [00:52:00] getting into some of these top schools. It's not like we're taking a whole bunch of slackers or anything like that. At the same time, there are a lot of students who may love this industry if they knew that it existed like the opportunity was ...

Tons of people go to school for engineering, but how many engineering jobs are really out there for people? [00:52:30] Some of those people who go to school for engineering realized, "Damn, I like the hands-on aspect of assembling and putting together this work more than the actual part of the engineering, but where was that option for me when I was in high school?" I think it's important that we look into how to bring back trade schools and things like that that one give [00:53:00] more men and women the foundational skills of it but then also let them know that their careers in construction and in the trades can give them a good lifestyle as an adult and allow them to support themselves.

Barrie: Do you think electricians are paid fairly or overpaid or underpaid?

Kenny: I don't know think anybody ever want less money. I'm [00:53:30] definitely not complaining with what we make. I feel like I'm very fortunate. I think I started feeling fortunate as a fourth-year apprentice.

Jaime: That's your transfer to fortunate lifestyle?

Kenny: Yes. That was my transfer to fortunate lifestyle.

Barrie: Prior to that?

Kenny: Prior to that? It's rough throughout. It's like I really give a [00:54:00] lot of credit to a lot of the brothers and sisters who go through the apprenticeship who have left other jobs, who have families already, who may have mortgages already because I was single. No kids living at my parents' house, didn't have to pay rent. I think I only have my phone bill and maybe half of my car insurance, and I was still struggling to make ends meet for my circumstance, [00:54:30] yet there were people who were going through the program with a lot more responsibility than me that saw the finish line, and that was their motivation to make it work until then. Maybe it makes them a stronger person at the end. Maybe they appreciate it in a different way than I do at the end. I definitely always

respected my brothers and sisters who had [00:55:00] a lot more responsibility than me going through the program.

Jaime: Kenny, what advice would you give someone starting out in your field? I ask this question now because I know your sister is just starting out. It's a special situation because she's your sister. I did have the opportunity to interview her already. She did tell me a story about you and her going to Home Depot. Would you elaborate a little bit [00:55:30] this happening? What happened?

Kenny: My sister was like me in the sense that she had no prior experience in this field and different from me; she's a woman. I already know some of the stigmas that still linger within the industry when it comes to women [00:56:00] on the worksite. I wanted to just prepare her as best as I could for what she may encounter on the job.

We did a little field trip one day. It was me, Courtney, and my dad, and we went to Home Depot. We walked up and down the electrical aisle looked at all the different ...

Jaime: Fittings.

Kenny: Fittings. I'm trying to list ... material. We just kind of ... This is a 4-inch [00:56:30] box, this is a 5-inch box, these are raised plates, these are wire molds, this is conduit, these are couplings, these are connectors, just different things so she had some sort of idea of what she was getting into. I wanted to make sure she understood the physical aspect of it as well. We walked over to the EMT section where all the kindorf and everything was. We had a little exercise where she had [00:57:00] to pick up a bundle of three-quarter and 1-inch EMT. I think a bundle of 1-inch EMT is the heaviest bundle that we deal with. I figured if she could carry that out a few feet, pick it up, put it down, she'd be all right. She did well. I'm a very proud of her.

Every time I see people that she works with, they always speak highly of her. [00:57:30] She already has great stories about work, and she seems to be enjoying. She's got her little apprentice posse that they always hang out with her. One of her classmates came to my house the other day. We had a nice little beverage. She seems to be coming into to it well. She's one of those people that I admire because she's got two kids. Luckily, she's still living at home with parents. She's making more money. Before, she got [00:58:00] not much. She'll surpass that in her apprenticeship, but it's hard to go backwards to go forward again. She saw that end goal and knew that it was the best opportunity for her and her family. I'm hoping that she sees that all those passions that she had before entering the business, she can still pursue as well while still having [00:58:30] a great career.

Barrie: Are we coming to [inaudible]?

Jaime: I have one more question for you, Kenny. Actually, two more questions. You speak about your father as this role model as a son where he went through this career being there for you. How was that relationship affected your career or what kind of [00:59:00] influence has it had on your career?

Kenny: I guess my parents both, they were ... We were a family. We always did everything together. My parents are always very active in the community. There was a point where my dad was pretty active volunteering within the union. I guess all those things have just been something that they never hid from us. They made us a part of it. We used to hang out up at the joint board all the [00:59:30] time. I remember my dad taught the asbestos class. All class nights. I remember our dinner was a butter rolls because they used to have butter rolls and danishes and things like that, little pastries for, I guess, the people who participated in class. We'd have our little butter rolls and we'd hangout out there and run around the hallways while he was teaching class.

[01:00:00] We always were at the Labor Day parades and things like that. I guess coming into it our dad ran work. He was a foreman. Everybody that I've come across has always spoken highly about the type of union man he was, the type of worker he was. I feel like if I don't try my best to do the most that [01:00:30] I can, then that's disrespectful to what he left for me.

I think there was one time like a not so tasteful joke around somebody who knew my dad and it's like I thought I was going to get a bunch of laughs, and the dude looked at me is like, "I don't think your dad would like that." I guess that's just kind of what ... That's the regard that people that I [01:01:00] come across hold my dad in. It's like you have to ... It used to be a lot of pressure but it's ... You want to be able to do that to honor your parents. Your parents work hard so that you can be better than them. That's my responsibility to work as hard as possible to do that for them.

Jaime: Kenny, I have one more [01:01:30] question for you what inspires you?

Kenny: The world inspires me. It's like a cliché answer almost, right? It's hard to be uninspired especially today because it's like there's so much going on, and it seems like there's so much stagnation and everything. People fight so hard. I used to be very into the civil rights movement. That's a long history of people working [01:02:00] really hard for something to still be denied opportunities. You still see that today in civil rights. You see that in education. You see that in politics.

Recently, I've been listening to the Logic album. He has a new album now called Everybody and it's really good. I recommend it to listen. One of his monologues, he pretty much says that [01:02:30] you have to do what makes you happy. For everybody, that's going to be a little bit different. What's always made me happy is helping other people and giving whatever I can to make sure that there's a little bit more equality in the world. It sucks that we live in a society where [01:03:00] everyone does not have equal access and opportunity to be

successful or to be whatever it is that they would like to be. As long as you continue to see those signs in the world, you have to continue to do whatever it is that you feel you can do to bring people together or create a little bit more harmony within the world.

[01:03:30] The opportunity to continue to work towards that is kind of what inspires me really to do whatever I can. The better electrician I am hopefully, that means the more opportunities that there will be for other people like me to be able to come into this business and create their own opportunities and create opportunities for other people like them.

Barrie: That's a beautiful place to stop but I still want to ask [01:04:00] you one more[crosstalk 01:04:00]. Think about this as a time capsule, somebody might come upon this 20 years from now, so anything else you think you'd want to say about your job, the union, this [01:04:30] experience if somebody might look at years from now.

Kenny: I guess if you're given the opportunity to do something like never say no whether it's in this industry whatever industry you may end up getting into or just life. It's like my experience at Local 3 has been a little different than a lot of my peers just because I never [01:05:00] say no. Me and Jamie work together at Citi Field. I just happen to be somewhere and somebody asked me if I wanted something that sounded different, I said, "Yes, why not?" I didn't know what it was going to be but it didn't matter. I just never said no.

A lot of people laugh at the person when the teacher says, "Can I get a volunteer?" and somebody raises their hand and everybody is laughing. "You don't even know what [01:05:30] it was," but it doesn't matter. The person who's guiding your class or the people who are guiding our industry, if you get an opportunity that's good, bad, different, whatever it is, you don't know what it will be and how it may alter your mind a little bit if you say no and you close yourself off to that opportunity.

Sometimes [01:06:00] I feel as a minority, if you say no, there's no guarantee that another person like you will have the opportunity to do it. It's important for us to continue to say yes as much as possible so that we can do as well as we can and break some of those old stigmas and hopefully create that opportunity once again for other people so just always say yes, always say yes.

Jaime: Kenny, we have one [01:06:30] question that you didn't answer. You just skipped over it.

Kenny: What would I change?

Jaime: I want to rephrase that question to see if will give you a different perspective on it. Is there something in our industry that is changing that you don't want to see it change or you would like to stop it from changing?

Barrie: Or vice versa. It's changing and you like it.

Jaime: Or, yes, thank you, [Barrie01:07:00] [01:07:00] or it's changing and you like the change.

Kenny: Now that we brought up the issue of diversity, that's definitely something that's changing and I think that's continuously changing, societies continuously slowly becoming more open to groups of people. We are fortunate to be in Local 3 which has always had a progressive mindset [01:07:30] not just progressive but also proactive.

Fortunately, for me I've had the opportunity to interact with people from other locals within our union and a lot of them are still dealing with issues that we've already either worked out or have been working to fix within Local 3, the issues with women, issues [01:08:00] with minorities so people of color issues, even with the LGBTQ community. Those are things that we've already addressed. I guess our membership knows where we stand on it and we're continuously opening up that dialogue. It makes you proud to be a part of an organization like that. It's like the stories my father used to share are nothing like the experiences that I'm having. [01:08:30] It feels good to know that there has been progression within our industry in that short amount of time.

Unfortunately, there are always people that aren't happy with the way things go, but I always believe in patience. A lot of things that happened in this country didn't happen [01:09:00] overnight. It took a long time, a lot of fighting, a lot of struggling for it to happen. For us to expect anything different in our industry is unrealistic. As long as everybody is doing their part to make sure that change continues to make us better, then we're going to keep going into the right direction. People who are against that change or whatever it is [01:09:30] that ... They're eventually going to be unhappy people because it's inevitable. It's going to happen. I'm happy to be a part of an organization like this one where.... we have leadership that recognizes. We have to change with the world.

Jaime: Thank you, Kenny. I don't have anything.

Barrie: Thank you.

Jaime: Is there you want to add or anything that we missed or you want to ask us?

Kenny: Another curveball.

Jaime [01:10:00] No. Just think closing like if there's anything that was on your mind that you wanted to speak about or that we didn't bring attention to or anything like that.

Kenny: Nothing. I'm just happy to have had the opportunity to participate in this. I think it's amazing that you guys are documenting the accounts of working people

within [01:10:30] this industry. It's important that our stories are told because they're often not. Most the people that don't know about this industry, it's like they may be going through something similar in whatever it is that they're doing or the things that may inspire us may also inspire them. Hopefully, they can [01:11:00] identify with us and identify with other working people, so that it just brings us more together.

Barrie: Thanks.

Jaime: Awesome job, Kenny.

Barrie: Yes.

Jaime: Hopefully, we can get Pops to come in and hang out.

Kenny: Yes.

Jaime: I'm going to shut this thing off.