



NEW BEDFORD FISHING HERITAGE CENTER

Date of Interview: June 16, 2017

Hall, Jay ~ Oral History Interview

Laura Orleans

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Background

Name of person interviewed: Jay Hall [JH]

Facts about this person:

Age: 55 years

Sex: Male

Occupation: New Bedford Welding Supply

Residence: Plympton, MA

Ethnic background (if known): Irish, Italian, Scottish, English

Interviewer: Laura Orleans [LO]

Transcriber: Tracy Gillen [TG]

Interview location: New Bedford Welding Supply, New Bedford, MA

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Key Words

compressed gases, fab shop, cylinder, oxygen, nitrogen, argon, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, medical gas device mixtures, medical gas drug mixtures, gas chromatographs, paramagnetic analyzers, hygrometers, acetylene, welders, welding rod, MEG, TIG, stick welding, electrode, Compressed Gas Associations (CGA), a 580, helium, manifold, vacuum pump, cryogenic, vaporizer, psi, 3K cylinders, 6K cylinder, catastrophic cylinder, Gases and Welding Distributors Association (GAWDA), inert gases, CTAP, Safety Data Sheet (SDS), twelve pack, high vis vest, high vis uniform, Fire Retardant Clothing (FR), steel tipped, composite tip shoes, beryllium copper, boom boom room, hydrotest, pigtail

Abstract

Jay Hall spent 25 years working in the medical gas industry and now works for New Bedford Welding Supply, which supplies compressed gas to fishing vessels in the New Bedford - Fairhaven shipping industry. He discusses his professional background, the different types of welding supplies and gas mixtures that New Bedford Welding Supply provides to the fishing industry, the process of filling a tank, the training provided to employees, specialty equipment, and potential dangers in the work environment. He also discusses a typical day, some challenging work situations and the benefits of working for a family owned business. Finally, he talks about the value of practical knowledge.

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[00:00] Intro; Jay Hall works for New Bedford Welding Supply, which provides compressed gases to the fishing industry. He was born in Chelsea, MA, grew up on the South Shore of Boston and currently resides in Plympton. He worked for a worldwide compressed gas company, specializing in medical gases for 25 years until he was hired by New Bedford Welding Supply in 2014.

[4:48] Discusses his entry into the field as a cylinder filler/truck loader. Explains his training in medical gases, how he enjoys the people that he meets and problems solving aspect of his job.

[9:43] Discusses the welding supplies and gas mixtures they provide for fishing boats, begins to explain the process of filling a tank.

[13:26] Continues explaining the process of filling a tank.

[19:45] Describes the training provided to new employees, the explosion dangers associated with compressed gas, and the color coding of the tanks.

[24:18] Explains the color coding of the tanks and describes a typical day.

[30:07] Explains where he does his work, and describes two challenging situations with customers that he successfully solved. Discusses some of the specialty clothing that workers in the company use.

[35:06] Continues discussing specialty clothing in the industry, lack of workplace pranks.

[40:40] Explains the differences in working for a family based business versus a larger company.

[44:56] Continues explaining the differences between working for a family-owned business versus a larger company, discusses the uniqueness of the waterfront.

[50:15] Discusses the value of practical knowledge and his enjoyment of troubleshooting.

[54:48] Explains some work-related jargon and how he troubleshoots problems.

[57:52] End of audio.

[00:00]

Laura Orleans: Okay, today is June 16th in the year 2017 and this is an interview for the New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center, funded by an Archie Green Fellowship from the Library of Congress. As part of this project we are interviewing shore side workers in the New Bedford Fairhaven Fishing industry to record their stories, document their skills and knowledge and better understand their important role in the fishing industry. The recording and transcript will become part of the permanent collection at the Library of Congress. I am Laura Orleans and today I am speaking with Jay...

Jay Hall: Hall.

LO: Hall at New Bedford Welding Supply and the time is approximately 1:40 in the afternoon. I know you just signed a formal release but for the purposes of the recording, do you give us permission to record you?

JH: Yes, I do.

LO: Excellent. So, I know we just, we just established your name but again for the tape could you just introduce yourself.

JH: Hi, my name is Jay Hall.

LO: And what is your job in the fishing industry?

JH: Well, I'm not so much tied, I am tied to the fishing industry but, we provide compressed gases to the fishing industry for cutting welding, freezing of shellfish or fish, and that's pretty much how we're tied to it.

LO: Okay. And we'll dive more deeply into what that means in a minute.

JH: Okay.

LO: Just to get some basic background, when and where were you born?

JH: I was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts in 1962 at the Chelsea Naval Hospital.

LO: Okay. And did you grow up in Chelsea as well?

JH: No, I grew up on the South Shore of Boston, mostly in Abington, is where I went through all my schooling, and then lived in Weymouth for quite a while and then I moved to Kingston for a short period of time and then to Plympton and that's where I've probably been for the past sixteen years or so.

LO: So, Massachusetts but around, around and about.

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JH: Did do stint in Florida for about maybe a year but that was about it.

LO: And just out of curiosity, you're family's ethnic background?

JH: My, my mother's side of the family was Irish and Italian and my father's side of the family is Scottish and English.

LO: And was anybody involved at all in the fishing community?

JH: No, no, not really, not really. My grandfather did, owned a bunch of small businesses in the North End of Boston, back in, you know, the turn of the century.

LO: Sure. So tell me a little bit about your trajectory? You know, you went to school in, grew up and went to school and how did you end up here?

JH: Well, I went, after high school I went to college for a little bit. It wasn't really for me. Kind of more of a hands-on person. I did some jobs in some fab shops and things like that and I was always looking to make more money. One of the companies that we dealt with in the fab shop was a compressed gas company. And I got talking to one of the guys there one day and said how much do you make and he told me and I said I'm coming here for a job. So I got a job there and I kind of specialized in medical gases and that was something that was, that helped me grow, grow, you know my, I don't know how to describe it. But it helped me grow my...

LO: Range of skills?

JH: My range of skills. Thank you. And the company that I worked for was a worldwide company. They were based out of the U.K. and they needed people that knew how to, how to fill cylinders and how to do medical gases and follow all the regulations that are set down by the federal government. So I ended up rising through several positions to the point where I was the Medical Gas Compliance Manager for region North America. And I spent twenty-five years with that company and it was just a kind of crazy pace and I traveled all over the place. And I said I'm kind of getting tired of it and my twenty-five years came up and I said, you know what, I think I'm going to just go take it easy somewhere else. So, I had known the family that owned this company, New Bedford Welding Supply, for many years because just being in the industry it's kind of a small world and I had, you know, Mike and I, you know, the owner, Vice President of the company, had kind of said to me, "Hey, you know if you ever want to come here we have a home for you." So, I took him up on his offer and here I am.

LO: And when was that? Roughly?

JH: That was in 2014.

LO: Okay, so fairly recently?

JH: Summer of 2014. Three years ago.

[4:48]

LO: Great. So, maybe backing up a little bit. Tell me a little bit about what does it mean? Nobody grows up probably thinking I'm going to be, go into the world of compressed gases.

JH: Mmhmm. No.

LO: Or at least I don't think so.

JH: No.

LO: So, how did you learn about that as a field and what exactly is it that you do?

JH: Well, I took, I took the job with the company and they hired me as a cylinder filler slash truck loader. And you know, a lot of people don't realize what goes into filling one of these cylinders. Everybody always refers to my air tank, my air tank. Not necessarily air. There's oxygen, there's nitrogen, there's argon, there's carbon dioxide, there's nitrous oxide. I mean there's several other gases. And I just kind of felt like I hit my, my niche. The company that I worked for was very good about training employees and they sent me to, I worked in a few different plants, one in New Jersey. They sent me there. I was there for probably close to three months, working there, learning how to do medical gas device mixtures and medical gas drug mixtures. How to actually mix the gases and figure out how to do the percentages so your mix would come out right. Then they took me from there and I probably spent three months working at a plant in the Chicago area where they taught me how to run all the analysis equipment, the gas chromatographs, the paramagnetic analyzers, the hygrometers. All those different devices or test equipment and I just kind of felt like I kind of hit my stride at that point. And I wasn't, before that I was kind of a lost person, just jumping from job to job to make more money and more money and more money. And you know I did well at that but I wasn't really at home, so to speak. And now been in this industry for well, going on twenty-seven, twenty-eight years now and it's, I don't know anything I'd be happier doing.

LO: Tell me what it is that you enjoy so much about it. It's clear from the sparkle in your eye and the way that you're speaking about it that you love it.

JH: Well, it's the, it's the people. It's the guys that work here. And from my previous job too. It's the people that I work with, the people that I get to meet. And my previous job I traveled all over the country and the Caribbean and taught people how to do what I, what I had learned to do and still to this day people call me. Hey, I'm doing this and I'm not getting the right reading on the analyzer what, what's going wrong for me. And I just love that, you know. I love that. I love the fact that people will say. I can walk into a room and people will say, Oh, I know you. Do you know Jay Hall? Yeah, I know Jay, he helped me out with this, he helped me out with that. And I think it's more of the helping the people that I really like, you know.

LO: And troubleshooting it sounds like, or problem solving.

JH: Yeah, the troubleshooting's fun, sometimes it's, it's tough because trying to troubleshoot something I mean, I had to work with people all over the country and somebody will call you from Texas and say, this is happening and sometimes unless you're right there you don't see it. So, it can get frustrating. Sometimes I'd say, hey, jump on a plane and go. Well, it's Sunday afternoon at six o'clock, it's my weekend, you know. But I go do it and that was okay. You know, short notice stuff is fun too. I do, I don't know I just like the business. I like knowing all the things that I know and when customers come up here to pick things up and they say I know this cylinder's full or this cylinder's empty I can tell. Well, no, you can't. You can't tell. And I like to say to them, come on, let me tell you. There's only grams worth of gas in there, you'd never tell the difference between the weight of the cylinder and the weight of the gas inside, unless of course it was a, like carbon dioxide, which is a liquid inside the cylinder. Then you can tell, you should be able to tell the difference. So that's kind of, I like everything about it. I like the truck drivers, I like the things that come up and they say hey, can you go to do this, can you go talk to so and so. I just like that type of thing.

[9:43]

LO: So, when you started out, you said I'm not so much in the fishing industry but you provide services for the fishing industry.

JH: We do.

LO: Tell me a little bit specifically about how your work interfaces with the fishing industry.

JH: Well, we sell, I mean on every fishing boat things break. They have to either cut it loose or they have to weld it back on and we sell [noise]...

LO: Thank you.

JH: And we sell, or course we sell all the welding supplies you could ever need and we also sell the gases. So oxygen and acetylene would be a big thing for cutting. You know, and of course we sell welders and welding rod and we sell the certain gas mixtures too for different applications of welding.

LO: So back up.

JH: Okay.

LO: Pretend that I'm from Mars. How does, like I was unaware until I came to visit the shop last week or whenever that was, two weeks ago, that a welder needed a tank.

JH: Yes.

LO: So, can you talk about how the tank powers the torch?

JH: Well, what it...

LO: Or what it does?

JH: I'm not really that knowledgeable about welding.

LO: That's all right.

JH: But essentially, it provides, I believe it provides like a shield. The gas would provide a shield for the welding rod. You know and some welding doesn't require that. There's, there's, I guess there's a few different kind of welding. There's MEG and there's TIG. I'm not quite sure I know the difference. I've always been more on the getting the cylinders filled side than on the side of I know what to do with the welder. Because there is stick welding, which you don't need any gases for. You just need a couple pieces of steel and a piece of welding rod and an electrode and you just weld away. But you know, there's other types of welding that you do require the gases for, stainless steel you require gas for. There's, again I don't want...

LO: The dredges I think are made of steel.

JH: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And there's a lot of stainless steel on these boats and a lot of steel on these boats. So they have to, you know if something breaks, they have to, they have to weld it. And they probably have to grind it down before they weld it because you know you have to have clean, you know, clean plate. If it's rusty, it's not going to weld well so you need to grind it down. You need to clean it up and then you can lay your weld in.

LO: Take me through the process of filling a tank.

JH: Okay, well filling a tank is, first of all you have to have the right connection on it. And they're called CGA connections. CGA stands for Compressed Gas Associations. Each gas, and some gases share the same connection. For instance, nitrogen, argon, and helium all share the same the connection, which would be what we call a 580 connection. You connect your cylinder to the manifold, okay, and then you go through a series of preparations. Now depending on what gas it is, well, oxygen before you connect it you want to smell it, you want to take a whiff of it. If there's any acetylene that's leaked back into the cylinder we want to put that aside.

LO: And what does that smell like?

[13:26]

JH: Acetylene has like a sour, like garlic, garlicky smell to it. Not exactly like garlic but that type of odor. And what will happen is that will have a violent reaction. If you turn on the oxygen pump, which is high velocity pump and there's a lot of acetylene gas in an oxygen cylinder it can very well cause an explosion. So you want to prepare the cylinder, you want to do an odor check and you want to smell it. If there's no smell great, if there's nothing in the cylinder you're going to inject some nitrogen into it and then let that release and then you're going to wand it toward your face, wave it toward your face so you can get a smell of it. You want to make sure there's no oil, grease, or any kind of petroleum based product on an oxygen cylinder in particular

because oxygen and oil are not compatible at all. It will be a very violent reaction. So there's the, you know, we, guys in this industry have to have some brains. You just can't be a no brainer and think you just hook it up and go. Anyway, after you get the cylinder hooked up, you're going to vent all the cylinder, you'll open every cylinder up on the manifold. You'll vent it down, you'll close the vent. You're, you know, you're operating equipment when you have a manifolding system with different valves that do different things. [Coughs] Excuse me. Once you get the cylinder vented then you're going to turn on a vacuum pump. And you're going to pull a vacuum on all the cylinders. You're going to pull out any residual product. And then once that's done you're going to go out and you're going to cool down your pump. Now the pump sits at the base of a very large cryogenic tank. Like eight or nine thousand gallons of liquid oxygen, liquid nitrogen, liquid argon. You have to run product, you have to run liquid through that pump to cool it because that's how it operates. It runs, if you try and run it dry, you're just going to destroy the pump. So you have to get the liquid into it, you have to get it cold. And I'm talking temperatures of, you know, negative three hundred degrees or better, below Fahrenheit. And what happens is the liquid will feed by gravity into the pump. You start the pump, it will compress it into a line. The line goes to, and for lack of a better, we call it a vaporizer but if you think about a radiator on a car, it's a giant radiator. And as the liquid passes through all those lines, going back and forth or up and down, it vaporizes the liquid into gas. And then the pump, of course, compresses it into the cylinders. And as the cylinders fill, they fill by heat of, heat of compression will take place. And you can actually feel the difference if you felt the, you know if my desk was the cylinder it will be cold when you start. It's going to get hot while you're going through the process. And what you do is you take, you take a temperature and we have a chart all figures are figured out and the chart will give you the pressure rating across the top and it will give you the temperature down the side. And periodically you take a temperature reading as the cylinders fill and eventually what will happen is, it will all come together and meet and that's when it tells you shut the cylinder off. So, let's just say a cylinder is rated for 2015, two thousand and fifteen psi and it's probably also got an overfill on it of ten percent, which is normal. So we can fill that cylinder to 2215. We want that cylinder when it's done filling to be at 2215 but if we don't take the temperature as we're filling we are probably going to under fill cylinder. So that's why we, that's why we do temperature and pressure fill. And what'll, what will happen is once the cylinder, seventy degrees is considered a baseline. So if we fill the cylinder correctly, once the cylinder cools to seventy degrees we should be able to put a pressure gauge on it and it will be two thousand two hundred and fifteen psi. Maybe a little bit more, a little bit less, but probably within twenty and thirty psi on either side.

LO: It's quite a science.

JH: It is quite a science. It's very interesting. It's also, also very dangerous. When you're dealing with pressures that high and that's nothing. We fill, you know, we fill to about just below three thousand psi here. There are other cylinders that, there's cylinders called 3K cylinders which are rated around 3500 psi and there's 6K cylinders which are rated for a little over six thousand psi. A six thousand psi cylinder, if you wrap your body around it and held on tight and somebody opened the valve, you would take off like a shot with that cylinder. It's that much pressure behind it. You know and then we have other gases like carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide fills as a liquid but it's very important that when we fill carbon dioxide we only put a certain amount. We fill that by weight and it's very important that we only put the right amount of

carbon dioxide in because it can expand like ten times what it, what it's, from it's liquid to a gas. And at that point, safeties can blow on cylinders. If you look, this device right here, this little hex device? Inside that, if I was to take that off there's a little nickel plate in there. And that's rated to blow at a certain pressure so it doesn't blow the valve out of the cylinder or we have a catastrophic cylinder come apart. And that will, that will stop that.

LO: So, it sounds like training is very important.

JH: Absolutely.

LO: Critical.

JH: Training's very critical.

LO: How do you train people when they come in?

[19:45]

JH: Well, what I do is I have a computer based training program that's provided, there's a lot of industry support and one of the, one of the groups we're involved with is called GAWDA, it's Gases and Welding Distributors Association. And we're a member of GAWDA, we pay for a membership. GAWDA is a, they're, they do several things. They're a political organization, okay. They'll go and lobby in D.C. They provide guidance for industry. They work with the Compressed Gas Association. They provide a lot of things, buying groups, okay? We could group together as independent distributors and we can buy things cheaper if we all go in together. Kind of like going to B.J.'s Wholesale Club. So, GAWDA has a website that's called GAWDA University and I manage that from my desk and I assign, you know, assignments to new employees. Like Monday morning I have a brand new guy coming in who is going to be painting and blasting cylinders. And he's going to go through probably twenty or thirty different training modules between Monday and Tuesday and then a lot of it we're going to do on the job training, okay. I can't train the guy how to run out cylinder blaster by having him sit at the computer. We have to go to it together. I have to show him how it operates and we work like that. I can't show the guy how to fill cylinders properly from a website. But this will give him all the basics, it will give him all the warnings of what you're dealing with here and in this industry, probably the major thing you're dealing with is pressure. The second thing you're probably dealing with is inert gases. Okay, you got to remember, everything we deal with is invisible. You can't see it. So it's a, it's like a sleeping giant, so to speak, out there. I've had friends who have died in this industry from being asphyxiated. Working in confined space areas where nitrogen or argon or some other inert gases leaked into and you don't know it until it's too late. So, those are the other dangers. Now we don't, I'm not going to put any of these guys into a confined space, none of them are even close to being trained to do any of it but there are, you know there are situations where it could happen regardless, you know. If they were, if I sent them down in, we have a water pit out front for piping. I could send somebody in. Now chances are we are not going to get an inert gas all the way from there to there but those are the things that can happen. So yes, lots of training.

LO: Yep.

JH: Lots of training.

LO: And what you spoke about sort of the danger of an explosion?

JH: Well, there is danger of explosion, depends on the gases. Again, if, you know propane, we do a ton of propane; very flammable gas. We have another training program, it's called, and I don't know, it's called CTAP, but I don't, but I can't tell you what CTAP stands for off the top of, but this is mandated by the state Fire Marshall's office that anybody who fills or works on propane tanks or anything like that has to go through CTAP training. I recently worked with a fire chief from the North Shore on it because he called and we had re-qualified some cylinders for another company based in Boston and he said, well how do I know that you guys know what you're doing when you re-qualify and I said I have all the CTAP training to back it up and he said, enough said, you're smart enough to know, he said, nobody else does. So we get, we actually get a lot of compliments here because we know what we're talking about whereas some other companies don't necessarily. Yeah, they can get into the business but it doesn't mean they really know what they're doing.

LO: So, the first thing I noticed when I came in a couple weeks was the, all the different colors of the tanks.

JH: Yes.

LO: Talk a little bit about that.

[24:18]

JH: Well, each, each for industrial versus medical gas is a little bit different. Medical gases, the Compressed Gas Association suggests these are the colors you should use. So, green for oxygen, blue for nitrous oxide, gray for carbon dioxide. You know, if you're doing a mixture they want you to paint the body of the cylinder the balance gas color and then maybe colored rings on the shoulder and that's, again, these are all suggestions but now the Food and Drug Association has taken the stance that hey it's been historical that you've been doing it, that the industry's done this for years so that's what we expect to see. I'll be honest with you, I don't necessarily agree with their... I have no problem doing it and I'm not planning on changing anything but I don't agree with the fact that you should come to me and say we know this is a suggestion but we're going to make you do it. I think that's a little bit Big Brother, but that's just me. As far as industrial gases go, again Compressed Gas Association makes suggestions on what colors you should paint cylinders. We probably follow them pretty much. I mean most, most companies do. Our little signature is we have a color orange that we call New Bedford Welding Supply orange. So, for instance if we have a helium tank that's going to be for somebody blowing up balloons, we'll paint it brown, which is a suggested color but then we paint the collar of it New Bedford Welding Supply orange. And that's kind of our little signature and a lot of companies do that.

LO: So, that's sort of a branding thing for the company.

JH: Yeah...

LO: In a sense.

JH: Although, it's funny because we had, one of my guys said, came to me a couple month ago and he said hey, I saw one of our, I wouldn't say it's our competitor, but this is a company out there called NuCo CO2 and they're basically strictly beverage, they go to bars, they go to McDonald's, they fill up, you know, the big CO2 tanks but they will carry like a fifty pound cylinder, you know, comparable to that one. One of my driver's said hey they got our cylinder on their truck. Now that's a no-no. You can't, you're not supposed to fill anybody else's cylinders without their permission, things like that. And that's a federal, that's a federal mandate, that's a law. So I said well I know, let me check around. So I called NuCo and I said to them, hey, you know I think you got our cylinders and you really shouldn't have them because they're ours and they're not yours and you don't buy from us, you don't lease from us. And they told me the company where they get their CO2 from and I said okay, again, it's a small world, I know everybody in this industry probably within from New Jersey to Maine so I contacted the company that they were getting them from and I talked to the owner and I said to him tell what color do you paint your CO2 cylinders? Well, guess what? It turns out he paints them the same color we do. So it's not, anybody can do pretty much anything they want.

LO: All right, so here's the trick question. Describe a typical day.

JH: A typical day? There is no typical day. We, I get here about 7:00 am, open up the plant, turn on the compressor, and then I send out the emails of who called in sick or who's not going to be here or who's going to be late and then we start our day. Now what I like to do is make a list in the morning and say this is what I want to accomplish. I've found that I usually repeat that list the following day because I don't get everything accomplished because there's different things that happen. You know, the guys over in dispatch will call me and say, "Jay, we got to make a delivery here, we got to make a delivery there. Can I borrow this guy from you? Can you have this guy do that?" So all the things that just pop up detract from what you plan on getting done and I think that's just the way life is. It doesn't matter whether you're at work or whether you're at home, these things happen. But a typical day would be, you know filling some cylinders, making sure the truck drivers get out on time, maybe, you know, talking to a couple of customers here and there, that might have questions. Or you know, today, for instance, I had a customer contact me from, where is he from, Brittany Global Technologies, who might be somebody you might be interviewing from there somewhere down the road. But he was looking for the, an SDS sheet. Do you know what an SDS sheet is?

LO: I don't.

JH: So with every chemical, you, you're required to give out what's called, they used to call them MSDSs, Material Safety Data Sheet. Now they just call it a Safety Data Sheet. So, he contacted me, saying hey, we buy this this and this from you, can you get me the SDS sheet? So, that's something that I didn't plan on but it came up in my day. Sure, no problem, email them off

to him. So, you know, a typical day would be get about half of what you planned on and get a whole bunch stuff done that you didn't plan on getting done, you know?

[30:07]

LO: Does most of the work happen on site here or is there some work that goes on, for example on boats or in other locations?

JH: No, we, well there are, we do, and we also have two other locations for retail stores. They don't have a plant operation like we have; they just have a retail store like you saw last week. But, yeah, even those guys though, they can't, anything that they need done has to come here to get done. So I'll deal with the store managers on a daily basis. Hey I sent this cylinder down for Bob Jones, do you know what the status is on it? So, dealing with them every day. Which again, breaks, how do you think your day would be if it was the same thing over and over and over and you asked me earlier, what do I like about the business? That's what I like because no one day is ever the same, they're all different from one to the next.

LO: Can you think of any particular example of a really challenging situation that you, you know, something comes up you didn't expect? You saved the day or?

JH: Well, there's been a couple things. So, I'll give you two if you want?

LO: Sure.

JH: So, we had a customer, one of the things that we market is called a, it's called a twelve pack. And what it is, is a steel frame and there's twelve cylinders mounted in it and manifolded together. So, on a construction site it's a lot easier for them to use that instead of getting twelve single cylinders that they kind of got to move around. It's got a big hook on it, you can hook it, a crane can move it anywhere you want. Well, we had a customer that had one and didn't want to give it back. So, the sales rep had been up there a couple of times and I think two different sales reps had gone in there and I said you know what, it's on my way home. I said, let me swing in and talk to the guy. Well, guess what, the next morning I was on up there with a truck and the guy helped me load it on the truck and everything else. So that was a bit of a challenge because the guy was not cooperating with anybody else.

LO: And what did you say to him that kind of...

JH: Well, I think the salesmen were probably just a little bit too nice about it maybe? And I think I kind of said, hey you know what? I am coming to get this tomorrow whether you like it or not, you know, I would appreciate your help loading it and I'm sure he, I don't know the circumstances but I'm sure he probably owed money and didn't want to talk to anybody from here. But he was, once I basically said this is how it's going to go, and I said I am not taking no for an answer, that's how it went. There was no threats or anything, don't get me wrong but the other one was we had a, we deal with, we have one customer, very, very big construction company. They build power plants. They came to us last year and they said okay, if any of your guys, your truck drivers, or anybody's going to come on our sites, they have to have hard hats,

they have to have high-vis vests, things like that. So anyway, my boss and I sat down and he said okay, let's put this together and we put together a list of what the guys who would go to this site needed. And I said to him, one of the things that we, one of the biggies was the high-vis vest and I said you know what, we got guys of all different shapes and sizes, I said, and you know what's going to happen, we're going to give a guy a high-vis vest and next week he's going to lose it. Then he's going to get to the job site and they're going to say you can't come in. And it's going to cause problems for both sides of that business deal. So, I said why don't we just go with high vis uniforms. And he said hey that's a great idea, let's look into it. You know what, a month later all the guys are wearing high-vis uniforms. We don't have to worry about them carrying extra equipment or replacing extra equipment, we just put right into it.

LO: I noticed that as I came in.

JH: Yes.

LO: So they're reflective with kind of yellow, fluorescent yellow.

JH: They call that high-vis.

LO: Any other specialized clothing that?

JH: Not in this company.

LO: Shoes, goggles.

JH: Well, safety shoes absolutely. The former company I worked for you had to wear FR clothing which is Fire Retardant clothing. Kind a little bit of overkill for just filling oxygen and nitrogen and argon.

[35:06]

LO: And the shoes are like steel tipped?

JH: The shoes are steel tipped or composite. These happen to be composite tip shoes. They don't, believe it or not they don't get as cold as steel toes. But, yeah, you want to wear, you know, long pants. Although, we kind of, if it's a hot day we let it go.

LO: Gloves?

JH: Gloves, eye protection, hearing protection. Depending on what's going on, you know? I have a guy today, I think he's done out there now and he was blasting cylinders today. Small, small little beads of steel shard. So, I want, you know, he's got to wear his glasses. Because if you get one of those little things in your eye, it's going to bother you. You're going to have to go to the hospital. So, we want to make sure we're all set. I mean I've busted up my knuckles and everything else when I should be wearing my gloves. But I'll get out there and something will

come up and I'll say I'm right here, let me get into it now when I should just walk back here and grab my gloves and do it and I don't.

LO: And are there tools that are special to what you do?

JH: Yes and no, you know when you're working with flammable gases you want to use brass. So, we have a lot of brass hammers. When we're, we'll repair propane tanks, you know when you have to de-valve them, you're going to use a brass hammer to give us a little advantage. But you don't want to use steel because steel can spark against steel and you could, you know, have a problem. Back at the other company I worked at I did a lot of flammable device gas mixtures and actually worked in, in an explosion room. We called it the boom boom room. The building was, it was a small building that was made to for the walls to blow out if there was an explosion, it was kind of a sacrificial type building and, you know, and when you worked in there you couldn't have a cell phone on you, you had to wear cotton because you don't want to produce any static, you know, everything was, you know, you're tools were what they call beryllium copper. They were beryllium copper mix. An adjustable wrench, like this, this is about twenty bucks. A beryllium copper adjustable wrench like this is about two hundred and twenty dollars. So, highly specialized. Simple tool but very, very highly specialized.

LO: And do the workers provide their own tools or does the company?

JH: Oh no, the company provides. We'll provide the tools. I mean we'll, I have lost my patience with guys who come in and want a new pair of safety glasses every day. I'll say I've given you five pairs last week, wear those. Or the gloves, they all, I need new gloves today. Well, I just gave you a new pair of gloves last week. Well, I left them at my girlfriend's house. Go get them and bring them back, you know?

LO: So you mentioned the boom boom room. It's a great interview because you're anticipating almost every question.

JH: Oh, I'm sorry about that.

LO: No, it's excellent. So, I'm curious, I'm always fascinated by language in every occupation, job, you know, culture has different, sort of, terms that they use, so can you think of other things besides the boom boom room? That you all would know but the rest of us?

JH: Well, these guys probably wouldn't even know the boom boom room because...

LO: That was specific to that plant.

JH: That was specific to that plant but no I don't, I don't, I don't think so. I mean, I'm sure there's something but it's probably not appropriate for the tape.

LO: Any nicknames? What's the culture like in the...

JH: Oh boy, this is. I like to call this a hard hat area. Even though you don't have to wear a hard hat. I mean they're good guys, don't get me wrong but boy are they a rough crowd. You give them an opening and they're going to pick at you. But they're, again, they're all good guys and it's all within, it's all good, you know, it's all goodhearted fun.

LO: I hesitate to ask but workplace pranks? You know, like some...

JH: Not...

LO: Things you do on the job?

JH: No, we don't, no, not really. These guys are pretty serious about their job and we'll, you know, we have, one of the things that happens and it happens by mistake and it happens all the time. When we hydrotest cylinders you have to fill the cylinder with water. And we have, what we do is we buy like a gas nozzle, you'd go to the gas station. But we have it hooked up to a hose and it's just water going through it. But what will happen is, you know when you're at the gas station and you hit full and it clicks off, sometimes that doesn't click off and if you're standing in the wrong spot, you're going to get a shower. So there's, you know, that happens. I mean the things that happen inadvertently, you know. It's not a place to fool around because you can get hurt or you're going to hurt somebody else. You know I've seen some paper airplanes, I've seen some elastic bands whizz by but nothing, you know, nothing crazy.

[40:40]

LO: Yeah. And is there anything you think that's unique about the fact that you're working in essentially a family business?

JH: I think it's very unique because the company that I worked for prior to this they, you know, everybody was a number, okay? And I can remember when I talked to Michael, who's, basically, his parents, his family owns it but he runs the show. And I can remember meeting with him for dinner and we said we wanted to talk about coming to work here and he said, you know he said, you're going to be appreciated. Which is something that I wasn't at my other job because, nobody, you know, yeah was I appreciated? Yeah, I was appreciated but I was appreciated by the people that I helped. But I wasn't appreciated by the people above me because they didn't know that the people below me, you know, thought I was fantastic and helped them out a lot, you know? But here, everybody knows. And, and, and the owner, the, Mike's dad and mom and brother, I mean and they treat me, they treat me like I'm part of the family. Whereas the last company I worked for you were just, the last company I worked for I probably could, probably could have not answered my phone for two weeks and nobody would have said anything.

LO: Was it much larger?

JH: Oh yeah, it was a world-wide company.

LO: That's right, you said.

JH: So.

LO: But it is interesting in the Fairhaven/New Bedford, on the waterfront here, lots and lots and lots of family businesses.

JH: Oh, absolutely.

LO: So, still in place, which is, you know. I mean it's starting to change a little bit with boats I think?

JH: Yeah?

LO: But.

JH: Well, it's also interesting the people that I meet through, the mechanic for my car. He's a guy I met through these people. Who I never would have known in my whole life, you know? And you know, I put my car in for service with him all the time. I don't take it anywhere else, even though I live forty miles away. I wait until I get to work and then I drop the car off. I don't say oh, I'm going to have to take the day off, so I can go to this specific guy up my way. And, and just like I say, all the other people I've met too, the mechanic, we have a mechanic here that comes in and works on our trucks, you know he's kind of a mobile mechanic guy. I mean, another person I've met down here, you know if it wasn't for being there I wouldn't know, you know? And specifically people that, you know, the Cooks, I've been dealing with, the owners of the company, have been dealing with for years. Now they're my friends too, you know.

LO: A lot of loyalty.

JH: Lot of loyalty.

LO: And a lot of your word is very important.

JH: Oh yeah. Absolutely. I talk to, you know I talk to customers all the time and I make a point to, because I know if I don't react, they're not going to be happy with me here. They're going to say wait a minute, that's why we, because, when I met and really met the owners of this company I worked for the other company and I worked as a consultant to distributors, which this is considered a distributorship. And they knew me on my word. I took care of them when I was a consultant so I have to be, when I work, now that I'm working for them I have to be even more involved or, I don't know if I'm searching for the right word but I have to make sure I do the right thing, even more now. You know? But, they wouldn't have hired me if I didn't because they already knew that I would take care of them, you know? And they take care of me.

LO: And do you think that culture is pervasive, you know you're sort of higher up I assume in the structure here?

JH: Yeah. Yeah.

LO: But for the other guys are there, do people stay for a long time?

[44:56]

JH: We have some guys that stay for a long time, I mean we have, there's a couple guys, well, Paul's been here. Paul actually was here for five or six years and then left and came back and he's been back for ten or twelve now. We have one guy out here, Fred. Fred started here as a junior in high school on a work-study program. And now it's, you know, fifteen years later, he's still here. They guys that work the counter, been here since they were eighteen years old and they're in their forties now, you know? And then, you know, you do have guys that are looking, you know, I mean, filling cylinders is not a, it's not glamorous by any means, you know. Blasting cylinders and painting cylinders, it's not glamorous. But if you, you know I mean, if you stick around and learn, then you're going to, you're going to stay, you know. I have a guy that I hired about a year ago out here, Ryan. And this kid is just fantastic. He anticipates everything that I'm going to want him to do and he just does it without being asked. He's another guy, if he sticks it out, he's probably going to be my, he's probably going to replace me, you know. But you know, on the other hand you do have the other guys who, hey it's a job for the moment and... I had a guy when I first came to work here, he was our cylinder painter and blaster. And, his name was Kevin, he was from Fall River, great, great, guy. But his family had always been in the baking business and the bread delivery business and when he saw his chance to get his own bread route, he left to do it, you know? But it's funny because sometimes, he'll be stocking bread at a Walmart where we're making a propane delivery and he'll give, a couple weeks ago he gave I don't know, like ten boxes of Ring Dings or something to the guys. You know we all had a feast and I texted him afterwards, hey Kevin, thanks, haven't seen you in two years but thank you, you know. So, we like to stick together I think.

LO: Well, good, I don't know that, I mean, I could continue to ask questions all day but I think I've kind of covered for the most part what I was looking for.

JH: Sure.

LO: Do you have anything else that you want to share?

JH: No, I don't think so.

LO: That I haven't really covered?

JH: Yeah, I think.

LO: I mean we kind of touched on the uniqueness of the waterfront community.

JH: Yes, yes. And it is unique, it's very unique. I mean, especially, especially here. When I worked for the other company that was based out of Hingham, about the only, did we deliver to the, yeah I guess we delivered to the shipyards in, in Boston, the graving docks, you know, we, were involved but it was more The Big Dig and more hospital stuff and more specialty gas things

than it was, you know, yeah we had our industrial accounts but this is more industrial accounts than medical accounts and that's kind of where I came from, but...

LO: And why is that, I don't know the right word, but why do you appreciate that, what do you appreciate about that difference?

JH: Well, the fact that it's different. I was, I was constantly dealing with hospitals and going in talking to people in research labs and things like that and you'd be surprised, I'll tell you a quick story. I had a, now this is an MIT person and they ordered a mixture of carbon dioxide with air and because of the DOT regulations when you make up the label you had to write in the, the oxygen concentration because you know what air is made up of right? Oxygen and nitrogen, mostly nitrogen. So I made out the label and he called me up and he said this mix is wrong, it can't be right. I said, you know what I am going to be in town later today, I'll come in and see you. So I went in and we stood there and he said to me, I don't want any air in my, I don't want any oxygen in my air. And I said, do you realize what you are saying to me. And he said, yeah, I don't want any oxygen in my air. I said then it's not air. And he said, no you're wrong. And you know here's me with a vocational school education arguing with an egghead from MIT and finally we, we worked it out but he, you know, honestly didn't realize that there was air, that there was oxygen in the air that we breathe.

LO: That's interesting. So that, that sort of leads me to another question...

JH: Okay.

LO: About you know, the knowledge base on the waterfront is amazing to me.

JH: Oh, absolutely.

LO: The more I do these interviews, it's so impressive and a lot of is not school, you know book knowledge.

JH: Right.

[50:15]

LO: I don't know where I'm going with that. But it is, do you feel like that's more respected here than it is in other places? Or more valued?

JH: I do think in some respects it is. You know, we had, I worked with NSTAR a year or so, not NSTAR but Eversource a couple years ago and they had a cylinder they used to actuate. It was a cylinder of air and it was used to just actuate a switch and I said to, they said, it's got to be air, and I said well you know we only fill air once every six months. You don't want to sit here and wait for it do you? And they said, no. And I said, why don't you just use nitrogen? I said it's probably better. I said, it's dryer, it's cleaner, I said, why don't you just use that? And you know these guys were like holy cow. Can we do that? Of course you can do that, you know, here you go, give it a shot. But, you know, nobody else, these guys had been coming here for years,

nobody else knew we could do that, you know. And of course they didn't even know and they're the ones with the equipment. So I do think that, I think you have to have some kind of smarts, and I spent a little time in college, I mean, but I was also brought up in a home where, my mother was a school psychologist, my dad was an engineer for Polaroid. So, you know, some of it's got to rub off, you know. Not that I'm the brightest light in the string, mind you, but.

LO: But I think there is also a lot to be said for practical knowledge.

JH: Absolutely, absolutely.

LO: And for, you know, what it sounds like to me is that you're taking everything that one learns in chemistry class, which made no sense to me while I sitting in that class and applying it. Or it sounds to me like a lot of chemistry.

JH: I took, I actually went and took a chemistry class and the chemistry teacher, it was like, I don't know, it as like Chem 101 or something. It was the most basic class and he said, after the two, because I was going every Saturday, and I was probably about thirty years old and he said to me, you know what, two things, he said. Can we do a field trip to your work so you can show us all the gas testing equipment and explain how it runs and number two, don't come back to this class. He said, it's wasted on you. But believe me, I'm not a chemist or anything like that but I, but I know the gases, I know how they react in certain situations, you know, and I know what to look for, if I'm... And it's all, the funny thing is it's all common sense. I remember years ago we had, who was the customer, I think it was GE and we were selling them helium to use in their process for you know, making jet engines, whatever part of it was. And they kept coming back to us and they said, that's a very high oxygen content in the helium. Well, if you, if you just, like and I just pick this stuff up from being around it and listening to other people. There was a guy who taught me all kinds of stuff. He's probably about eighty years old now. But man if I just paid attention to him and I learned. But anyway, we were, so I test the helium and it was 210 parts per million of oxygen and I'm like, wow that's crazy and we went to the plant. They were manufacturing the helium at a plant up in Acton, Massachusetts and we went up there and I took a squirt bottle and I squirted down every connection and I'm like jeez I can't figure it out. There's no leaks. And I went back and I tested more helium and every cylinder I tested was coming in two hundred and nine, two hundred and ten parts per million. I said, wait a minute and I got out my calculator and I extrapolated it out and I said, that's twenty-one percent oxygen. The further you get down the line, it's twenty percent. So, I went back and there's a, I found two things. First of all they had put the wrong pigtailed on the manifold. The line with the pigtailed was Teflon. Pigtail is... Let's see, do I have one here?

LO: That's a good example of the kind of workplace language.

[54:48]

JH: Yeah, a pigtail is, usually it can be, stainless steel, kind of hard tubing that you can bend a little bit or it can be flexible and it's got like a Teflon lining but it's armor jacketed so it can withstand high pressure because that's what comes from the manifold to the cylinder when you fill the cylinder. And what I found was, they had put Teflon lined pigtailed on their helium

manifold and what happens is helium permeates through the Teflon. Okay, there's one problem. So when you're vacuuming it, you're vacuuming in air. The other problem I found was there's a, there's a safety for the vacuum, on the manifold because if you introduce pressure to your vacuum pump, you're going to, it's not going to be a catastrophic event but you're going to damage it. And what had happened was that little check valve popped open and I took, I had a, like a lid from a coffee can was handy. It's like a round piece of brass like this, about this long. And I took the plastic cover from the coffee can and I put it up on the bottom of it and it sucked it right up to it. And I said, oh, that should not be doing that. So, what was happening was, every time they were vacuuming off the cylinders they were vacuuming in air. And the vacuum pump was strong enough so that when you read the vacuum gauge, you'd say the cylinders are vacuumed but in reality you basically had pulled a vacuum of one atmosphere into the cylinder. Then when you fill it you beat it down. You're beating down that twenty-one percent oxygen to the point where if you do the math from a 2215 cylinder, and adding, you know, two thousand, two hundred fifteen psi to it, on top of that one atmosphere of air, two hundred and nine, two hundred and ten parts per million oxygen. We solved the problem like that. But you have to, I mean, I don't know. I was always good at troubleshooting. I was actually always good at pointing out other's peoples problems and not necessarily my own but that's what's got me where I am.

LO: But that was significant because that was source gas for, not just for you guys, right?

JH: No, yeah that was for GE up in Lynn when they were making the jet engines up there. And they were going crazy. I remember the regional office manager, I actually got a nice kicker in my next check and he said, thank you very much, you know. So, that, but those are things you run across, you know.

LO: Very cool. All right.

JH: All right.

LO: I think we're done.

JH: Okay. Sounds good to me.

LO: Thank you.

[57:52] End of audio.