

HahnJamesJim\_19920617

RICHARD SHARPLESS: [00:00:00] This is an interview with James Hahn. We're at the SmithHahn Company at 836 East North Street, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. It's Wednesday, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1992, and it's approximately 8:30 in the evening. And Jim, how old are you?

JAMES HAHN: That's not a good question.

RS: (laughs) I always start with that.

JH: Forty-three years old.

RS: Forty-three, okay, and where are you from?

JH: From Bethlehem.

RS: Bethlehem? You lived here all your life?

JH: Well, originally, I was from Nazareth, Bushkill Township.

RS: But you moved here.

JH: Yeah.

RS: You went to school here?

JH: I went to school in Nazareth. Nazareth High School.

RS: And when did you graduate?

JH: Nineteen-sixty-six.

RS: Nineteen-sixty-six, okay. What did you do then?

JH: Out of high school, I worked at People's Coal and Supply for about a year before I went and started going to college then. [00:01:00] I only went to college for about six months before I got a summer job at Bethlehem Steel, and I stayed on at Bethlehem Steel, I guess because of the money and the times. And the draft was soon after me.

RS: But Bethlehem hired you despite the draft?

JH: Yes, yes.

RS: Okay, okay. Go ahead.

JH: Probably about nine months after I started working for Bethlehem, I entered the service.

RS: Okay, hold on. What did you do at Bethlehem Steel when you first started?

JH: Well, when I first started for Bethlehem Steel, of course since I was going to college at the time, they hired me as summer help. In the years, in that time in Bethlehem's history, they would try to fill in vacancies in their -- for vacations, for summer vacations of their employees. [00:02:00] They would hire college kids to fill in those gaps.

RS: I worked four summers myself at Steel.

JH: Yeah, and I was fortunate enough to get an opportunity to work for Bethlehem then, and of course, you know, back in

'68, you know, that was a good wage for anybody, I mean, in a summer job.

RS: Do you remember what you were getting then, more or less?

JH: Jeez, it's hard to say. It might have been about \$3 or \$4 an hour, \$3.50 an hour or something like that.

RS: What were you doing then? General labor?

JH: Yeah, I started basically as a chainman in the billet yard, worked there for one month, and they indicated they didn't need any help there, but they asked if I liked outside work, if I liked working outside. They said they had an opening in the quarry, so I said, "Yeah, I enjoy outside work." Since my grandfather had a farm, I worked outside most of my life, up until that point, helping out on the farm, so I took the quarry job. [00:03:00] And I ended up being a jackhammer man drilling holes in big boulders that were too big to run through the crusher, so we'd drill them and then blast them. Then, they could fit them through the crusher.

RS: And that's what you did up until the time you went in the army?

JH: Basically, that and labor-type jobs up until the end of December. I got a draft notice, so I enlisted in the army and, in January of 1969, I was on my way to Fort Dix.

RS: Now, you served three years in the army, right?

JH: Yeah, it was a little over three years. It was like three-and-a-half. I had a four-year enlistment. Or I had a three-year enlistment, and I had extended it while I was in Germany. [00:04:00] I did end up getting early out because they were deescalating Vietnam. I was on a levy at one time to Vietnam, and my unit was being transferred to Vietnam, and sort of in midstream, I was diverted to Texas, and then I only spent about one more month in Texas at Fort Hood, then I was discharged.

RS: After you left the army, where did you go?

JH: Because of federal regulations, I was allowed to go back to my previous employer.

RS: Bethlehem Steel?

JH: That's right, Bethlehem Steel. So I came back to Bethlehem Steel and I maintained the seniority that I had lost, that I had missed while I was away, so I had an opportunity to get back on equipment which was in the mining division. That's the division that I was assigned to at the last time when I left Bethlehem to go into the service.

RS: When you say you got on mining equipment, what do you mean?

JH: [00:05:00] Then I came back, and I started running -- an opportunity to run payload. Since I was familiar with

the equipment from my farming experience, it was easy for me to learn and pick up running some of the heavy equipment, and because of union rights, it was easy. You know, I was given an opportunity to be trained, you know, over a minimum period of time, and I was able to pick up different pieces of equipment as far as, you know, for experience.

RS: And how long did you do that kind of job with Bethlehem Steel?

JH: I'd say for the next four or five years, maybe about five years, I was running different pieces of equipment. Even at that time when I came back, well I started going back to college part time. [00:06:00] I started taking courses at community college, taking night classes, and since management saw that I was trying to improve myself, they started utilizing me as a supervisor for plant-related production operations as a field foreman.

RS: Okay, where was this?

JH: This was mostly, like, at the quarrying operations. If they needed a supervisor at different operations that I was familiar with, like at the quarrying operation, slide plant operation, blacktop plant. I worked as a technician within that first about five years at the blacktop plant as a

bituminous concrete tester, I did testing and design of blacktop.

RS: So most of this, you were learning on the job?

JH: A lot of it was. [00:07:00] They did send me to take some training, especially like for testing and analyzing the bituminous concrete and slag.

RS: So you apparently liked the company. You stayed with them.

JH: Well, again, you know, being a major industry, it's tough to go out and look for another job that's going to pay less money. There weren't many other employers in the Valley other than big Bethlehem Steel and Mack Trucks that paid the kind of wages that this industry did.

RS: Did you expect to stay with them though?

JH: Well, as I was going to college, more and more I thought about going and pursuing employment elsewhere because of the coursework that I was looking at. Initially, I started basically with accounting background and then my background criteria changed a little bit more to just a business management. [00:08:00] As far as making a change in Bethlehem, those opportunities were really not that easy to come about.

RS: So you felt somewhat limited then?

JH: Right.

RS: (inaudible) You thought you could go with Bethlehem.

JH: But at the same time, they continued to use me as a temporary foreman in different applications, and as time went on, I decided to go into maintenance operation, and I took some welding training. And soon after I completed that training and did some actual experience in machine shop and field work, I was offered a salaried position as a maintenance supervisor.

RS: A welder?

JH: Well, I did work as a welder after I took training at the Bethlehem Steel welding --

RS: [00:09:00] What year was that?

JH: Hm.

RS: Approximately, because by now you obviously had about seven, eight years in it.

JH: Yeah, it might have been back about '77, yeah.

RS: Anyway, once you were made a salaried person, did your attitude toward the company change in terms of deciding you wanted to stay there? In other words, how did you look at the company in those years?

JH: Again, at this time like in '77 and '78, there were some economic changes going on and high inflation. [00:10:00] Interest rates were extremely high.

RS: It's only the beginning of the decline of the industry.

JH: That's right, and really it was really soon after I went salaried, they put freezes on advancement, and there were major changes in the infrastructure of Bethlehem Steel, and that was kind of frustrating, for somebody that I felt was trying to do a good job and trying to improve myself and make things better for the company where, as an individual, I could see some of the items within Bethlehem Steel, areas where they were not spending the money of Bethlehem's wisely and how maybe some internal employees weren't utilizing Bethlehem's assets in Bethlehem's best interests as far as maybe utilizing some of Bethlehem's assets as personal. [00:11:00] Utilizing them more as a personal nature.

RS: In other words, what you're saying is that the management was lax, in many cases.

JH: Yeah, exactly.

RS: Did they do any modernization of plant while you were there? Were they making any efforts to upgrade their production systems or appliances in general?

JH: Well, in our operations, there were a few operations that were really modernizing, and again, there was some just keeping things operating, even, you know, especially in the



mining division. The only plant that it seemed like they were trying to do something with in our division was the mineral wool plant, which is kind of a new venture that started in the '70s. [00:12:00] I think it was a German-designed plant, and it was an operation for spinning the excess slag. Again, it was a byproduct of the steel which, to reduce the dumping of in landfill application, they were utilizing it to make insulation, which turns out to be a profitable operation.

RS: It did? Uh-huh. But that was about the only one you said.

JH: Yeah, they seemed to be investing money. Again, they had internal people, like engineers and so on, that seemed like they were doing a lot of experimental items related to the plant, although it seemed that some people that were assigned to that experimentation didn't have probably the proper background or experience necessary to continue.

RS: [00:13:00] You're talking about these technical people?

JH: Technical people. You know, I hate to direct things to the mining division or to mining.

RS: Oh, that's okay.

JH: But there were engineers assigned in our division that were alcoholics, that visually were seen drunk during working

hours. I mean, that were -- like they were the top of maintenance in the division.

RS: These people were protected.

JH: Exactly, exactly, and, you know, it makes employees really disgusted. [00:14:00] I mean, you see people -- when individuals that are much lower on the scale, even on the bottom of the scale, seeing people that are supposed to be supervisors, or looked up to and respected, things just coming to--

RS: Was this kind of thing general throughout the mill, or was this--?

JH: I wouldn't say it was. It just so happened this was an instance in our division. But this one particular man would handle, like, engineering for, like, the mineral wool plant or another plant. Well, this mineral wool plant was basically set up as an experimental plant, and research was doing a lot of work there, but this other supervisor has some internal control that he could try different things, and many of the things that he tried never worked. Never worked. And some of the projects that he started and spent thousands of dollars never got into operation. [00:15:00] In other words, he'd get an idea and work it through almost

to completion, and then change his mind, and then we'd take it all out.

RS: The company never said anything about it?

JH: Not to our knowledge.

RS: Oh.

JH: Not to our knowledge. I mean, again, we were subordinates, so if somebody came down on him, you know, we didn't know, you know?

RS: So obviously, this had a demoralizing effect on the workforce?

JH: I'd say so.

RS: Okay. How about the workers in those years? The union, of course, the Steel Workers is a very strong union. What about the workers? Were they -- you know, there's a lot of complaints about productivity and work ethic in the American worker and everything. Was there a lot of featherbedding, that kind of thing? What kind of attitude did the workers have in general those years?

JH: Well, I'll tell you, really in the mining operations, there's probably less featherbedding than there was in the main plant.

[00:16:00] Even the short time that I was in the main plant in the beginning of my stay with Bethlehem, which was about one month, I found that a lot of, you know, I'd say only about 30 percent of the time that I spent there in the first month was I working. In other words, supervisors would tell me when I'd have to come up and say, "Chain up some billets or move this, or move this, or do this, or do that." And then, after that work was done, they'd say, "There's a bench over there, there's a place over there. You know, go sit down and wait over there. When I have something else, I'll come and get you."

Now, that was like only within the first month. When I went to the mining division, things were considerably different. A lot of the operations that I worked at, people were productive. [00:17:00] The slag plant operation, you know, supervisors kept things moving. There were some people that had lax time, but if you were in a production application driving trucks, running payload, or running the crane keeping the production going, there were some incentives, and they were really minimal in the mining division versus in the main plant. The steel plant had considerably higher incentive rates for employees versus in

the non-basic steel operations, probably because of the profit differential.

RS: Okay. So about '77, '78, you were already going with the company about eight years more or less, eight or nine years, and you said you felt frustration because things obviously looked like they were starting to slide.

[00:18:00] What happened then? Continue the story. Where did you work at after that? You said you became a salaried supervisor.

JH: Mm-hmm. Well, during my first few years, as I said again, when I was back at Bethlehem, I had taken classes at the community college, and then I got my associates there, and then I went to Moravian and, again, worked most of my courses basically at night while I was working. I was able to graduate in '78 from Moravian, and I'd say I think it was in -- then in '80, they changed my position. I was a maintenance supervisor and, initially, I was working as a supervisor at the machine shop and then, also, at the mineral wool plant. [00:19:00] I ended up being basically maintenance supervisor at the mineral wool plant, which is a 24-hour around-the-clock operation.

RS: Okay, how many people were you supervising at that time?

JH: I'd say it was about 14 or 15. The people I had to supervise were maintenance, and only the ones that were directly assigned to the blacktop plant -- or, not the blacktop plant, the mineral wool plant. I had daytime people which did maintenance work either at the mineral wool plant or at the quarry machine shop, and I had to make sure that the ship millwrights, you know, had equipment to repair, that they kept up repairs on the off shifts, like on nights in mills.

RS: And how long were you there?

JH: [00:20:00] Hm, probably another two years just handling those kinds of duties, and then soon after that, we put up a brand-new machine shop over at the mineral wool plant because we were selling off some of the operations over here. We sold off the blacktop plant to Eastern Industries. We shut down the quarry on Freemansburg Avenue, and it was too much of a travel. And at that time, we had the slag plant operation over there, we had really a new metallics recovery plant operation, we had two mineral wool plants, and we would move the machine shop operation over there, build a new building, and then I took on responsibilities as a material control supervisor.

RS: Which means?

JH: [00:21:00] Basically, I was like a sub-purchase agent. For major, major purchases, we'd still go to corporate purchasing in Bethlehem's, Bethlehem Steel's corporate headquarters, but any of the local plant purchasing, I would handle directly.

RS: This was in about '84?

JH: Yeah, I'd say it was probably about '84

RS: Now, these were bad years for Steel.

JH: Exactly.

RS: What was happening around you at this particular time? We're talking about selling off, closings, and things like this.

JH: Initially, like I was saying before, right after I took a salaried position, they were talking about freezes. They also had some givebacks in wages by salaried employees.

RS: Salaried people, right.

JH: But they couldn't do that to the union people.

RS: Right.

JH: [00:22:00] So that was kind of disgruntling, just becoming a salaried employee and thinking I've reached some kind of a plateau or some kind of a goal for the hard work that I put in at the Steel and going to school.

RS: What did this giveback mean, in salary?

JH: Yes, it was maybe two percent or three percent.

RS: So it was a cut.

JH: Yeah, pay cut, exactly, but it seemed through the scuttlebutt that, some people like the higher ups in corporate areas were given raises before these cuts came out, so that --

RS: You're right.

JH: -- those were items that really even made it more frustrating for people that were lower on the totem pole where it seemed like they were being the scapegoats, and the higher ups and some of the other people at corporate --

RS: Did other people in your level feel the same way?

JH: Yes, people who were my peers. [00:23:00] Other maintenance supervisors or production supervisors that had just gone salaried. At the time I went salaried, there was a few others, maybe two or three others, that also were offered salaried positions that took them at the same time I did, and their feelings were mutual.

RS: Did you decide -- did you think about, at this time, did you think about leaving the company, at this point?

JH: Yes. I had taken on interviews, and again, I had educational background, but I didn't have much experience as far as in the field of my education.



RS: In management, in other words.

JH: Yeah, as far as management.

RS: Right.

JH: And what made it difficult to make a change is that starting salaries were still considerably lower than what I was making --

RS: Right.

JH: -- and considering that I had a family.

RS: [00:24:00] Right.

JH: It made it a little difficult to pursue that change.

RS: But obviously, you were worried about the future at Bethlehem?

JH: Exactly, exactly, and as time went on, we could see portions of the plant being shut down or sold off, made us think about it even more. And you start talking to other people, and you have other friends. Initially, I was in the union, and the person that I ended up being a partner with in the business I have now, you know, we were good friends before. Even after I went from the union to a salaried position, we had a lot of contact because when there were grievances or labor disputes, you know, we'd be discussing them, you know, or coming to resolve them or taking them to a higher grievance level. [00:25:00] You

know, we discussed what the future was there and what's going to happen tomorrow. Are they going to shut it down, are they going to sell it, or what?

RS: Mm-hmm.

JH: So, you know, we talked about the possibilities of opening a maintenance business, and we saw opportunities around us, and we decided to pursue some work.

RS: Okay, just before that, did the company at all discuss with you and other people what was happening?

JH: Really, the minimal amount of information was given to us.

RS: Yeah, during all these years?

JH: Right. As time went on --

RS: Yeah, I mean, they couldn't disguise the fact that the whole industry seemed to be collapsing and theirs too.

JH: Yeah.

RS: [00:26:00] But they didn't discuss this thing?

JH: Because of economic times, Bethlehem did indicate that they were trying to -- and because of the profitability -- they were trying to reduce their interest in non-basic steel operations and that. They seemed to indicate that they wanted to try to modernize the plant and put in more of their returns into the basic steel operations and sell off

non-basic steel operations to accumulate assets, I mean cash, to do those improvements.

RS: But they weren't doing that, in fact?

JH: Well, they weren't doing it, and they weren't doing it over a long period of time. They weren't making the improvements that were necessary. In other words, when the economic times were that bad, they were recognizing their foresights or their past mistakes. [0:27:00] And it was almost beyond the point of return already because of increased import and overseas modernization. I mean, we practically funded the modernization of Japan's industries and steel-making operations. Other countries have subsidized operations for it. The United States doesn't.

RS: So you'd say the competition subsidized foreign steel, more modern, more efficient production abroad, were some of the reasons for it?

JH: Oh yeah.

RS: But certainly management you think was at fault too because of the --

JH: Absolutely, absolutely.

RS: Okay. How do you feel about this experience? You put in, how many years did you put in total with Bethlehem?

JH: [00:28:00] Well, I had about 19 years and six months.

RS: Okay, 19 years and six months?

JH: Yeah, I was about six months from a pension, from a regular pension.

RS: Six months from a regular pension?

JH: Yeah.

RS: You mean to say you --

JH: I'll get a pension, but it's like a partial pension. In other words, 20 years is, like, a milestone to a different level.

RS: Right, so you won't obviously --

JH: I'll be receiving extra money.

RS: Let me ask you this, did you quit or were you laid off, cut?

JH: No, we were terminated. Basically, when we left the Steel, when I say we left the Steel, we were given an opportunity to go with the new company that purchased the mineral wool plant.

RS: Okay, non-Bethlehem?

JH: A non-Bethlehem operation. In other words, the new company offered us a job.

RS: Okay.

JH: [00:29:00] But Bethlehem already notified us that we would be terminated upon the completion of the sale of the plant.

RS: All right. You had at that point about six months to go for a pension?

JH: That's right, for a 20-year pension.

Martin Desht: Do you mean you were fired?

JH: No, we were -- it was a plant shutdown.

RS: Do you think that --

JH: It was called a plant shutdown.

RS: Okay, so you weren't alone -- I mean, you weren't just singled out yourself.

JH: No, this was everybody that was in the plant.

RS: In other words, you weren't saying all that simply because you were six months shy of that 20 years.

JH: No. No, but there was a lot of other employees in our division that were in the same boat that I was.

RS: All right. What kind of reaction? What was your reaction to this? You must've been --

JH: Well, that was frustrating to say the least.

RS: (laughs) To say the least.

MD: You had several people within that 20-year window?

JH: Yes. There was a lot of employees that were hired in about a two- or three-year period at the same time that I was.

RS: In the late '60s?

JH: That's right. [00:30:00] Late '60s and early '70s.

RS: And all these people were more or less what?

JH: They all ended up being short of a 20-year pension.

RS: Okay, do you know what happened to any of them? Where they went?

JH: Some decided to seek the new employment with the new company. The new company didn't offer jobs to everybody.

RS: Okay, so at six-months shy of retirement, you essentially get laid off as part of a general --

JH: It's called a plant shutdown.

RS: Plant shutdown.

JH: They shut the plant down because they were --

RS: Now, you said you were frustrated to say the least.

JH: Mm-hmm.

RS: I've got a feeling you felt stronger than that about it.

JH: Yeah.

MD: Before you get into that, did you say that was a profitable operation?

JH: The mineral wool plant was a profitable operation. Matter of fact, the mineral wool plant showed more profit than any other plant in our division.

RS: Why the hell did they sell it?

JH: [00:31:00] Well, again, their explanation was that they needed the cashflow from those assets to produce -- to modernize the system.

MD: Did they modernize?

JH: They did some modernization, but whether it was from our operations, you know, we'll never know. It seemed like there were some inside goings-on too.

RS: What do you mean by that?

JH: Well, it seemed like the division -- the person that was the division manager ended up being a partner in the company, or a major shareholder in the company, that bought out the division.

RS: (laughs) Alright.

JH: A major card player, let's put it that way. In other words, he was playing two sides.

RS: Was this known at Bethlehem at the time or not? Or do you not know that?

JH: Well, I think a lot of people had to know it, I mean even--

RS: [00:32:00] Well, if you knew it, obviously.

JH: --people knew it in our plant.

RS: Then obviously, some higher-ups knew.

JH: Evidently, it was being condoned. It was bought out by Broyhill Associates. And the Broyhill -- it was [name

redacted] was the major investor. He's the one that owns the furniture operation in the Carolinas. He does, had done, a lot of investing in other mineral-type applications or operations throughout West Virginia and even Western Pennsylvania. They also purchased, besides our mineral wool plant, a quarry in Hanover and also a quarry in Andover. Those are limestone or dolomite quarries.

Limestone.

RS: Limestone.

JH: Limestone.

RS: Yeah, because I know the one you referred to, and I worked there for about a week or two.

JH: [00:33:00] Damn.

RS: Yeah. Do you think that -- in general, how do you feel about this whole thing? Do you feel that -- you were livid, at least, at the fact that you thought Bethlehem should have certainly done more to prevent what happened from happening.

JH: Well, the thing is, you know, they were frugal with the money that they had in the '60s and the '70s. They handed it out and let control of it --

RS: Slip away?



JH: -- slip away. They invested in things like country clubs and extravagant things.

RS: Airports.

JH: I think upper management was allowed major fringe benefits that nobody will never know about. [00:34:00] And I think major amounts of money just were gone that should have been invested in modernization. I mean, there were some corporate people that probably lived like kings.

RS: Do you think that -- I don't know if you know this, or maybe you don't -- but do you think that management had an idea what was happening?

JH: I don't think -- for some reason --

RS: Or do you think they were just blind all the sudden?

JH: I think they were blind to see the course in history that this would take, really. They had to be blind to what was really happening, until it got to a point in the late '70s that had to ring a light. I mean, they all knew, [00:35:00] I mean, I feel like many people within the Bethlehem Steel operation knew what was going on.

RS: Right. You know, it's amazing because there were many people outside of both the automotive and steel industries who in the mid-'70s predicted what was going to happen. Saw what was happening, and it seemed that in both

automobile and steel, they weren't paying attention, they didn't want to hear. They just wanted to ignore it because of whatever. Thought the good times would last forever, I guess.

JH: Exactly.

RS: So then, in about 1984 or '85, you started part-time, a management maintenance type of business? I mean, pardon me, a maintenance type of business, okay.

JH: Well, I'll tell you what. Initially, we started our business. We started doing repairs to garbage trucks. For the one thing, we started doing some repairs like welding repairs.

RS: That was you and [name redacted].

JH: Me and [name redacted], right.

RS: Okay. [00:36:00] Now, how did you make your contacts out?

JH: Initially, before we even did that just so we could get some money together to buy a truck and buy some welding equipment, we did a little bit of roofing.

RS: Alright. Freelancing?

JH: Yeah, we did a little bit of roofing and house maintenance. And then, we just started to get the word around that we were in the welding business, and we were able to start some maintenance jobs on the side, whether it was evenings

or Saturdays and Sundays. We made some contacts, some client contacts.

The slag plant operation was being sold or closed down, you know, which was reducing our workforce. This was before our final shutdown. We could see the trend that the plant's being sold. It's shut down in our division, so we decided to pursue the people that were buying slag plant operations since we were very familiar with the slag plant operation. [00:37:00] And they were, at that time, not a Bethlehem Steel plant, or a operation. We figured why shouldn't we pursue them rather than let somebody else, another contractor, come and pursue them?

So we -- Myself and [name redacted] got together, and we gathered together, really one vehicle initially, and within a few months, we had a second vehicle with a welding machine on it, and we pursued the vice president of their operation and told him about our experience. Of course, he knew that what we did at Bethlehem Steel was in the slag plant operation. We were familiar with all the crushers, and the screening operations, and the conveyors, and he was moving this plant. In other words, because of the union, he couldn't run the slag plant operation on the same

physical plant. [00:38:00] So he was going to move this plant, the crushers and everything.

RS: Wait a minute, whoa. How was he going to get the slag?

JH: He was just going to move it out back to where they had dumped it for years.

RS: Oh, I see. Okay.

JH: Just out there. But what we did was we fabricated bases for the big crushers and fabricated hoppers and small screening operations. We did a lot of fabrication for the Waylite Corporation, and we helped just out in the line --

RS: Which is out there on Hellertown Road, right.

JH: -- just out the line a little bit further, right, and we did a lot of work out there. We had one guy. Soon after we started doing our operations, we had been doing work, like, nights and weekends, and soon, we hired a guy to work full-time during the day as well. Most of the work that he was doing at that time was for that operation.

RS: Was he a former Bethlehem Steel employee?

JH: No, that particular person wasn't, but a lot of the guys that we had working, like, nights and weekends were fellow employees.

RS: [00:39:00] You just sort of, word of mouth got around and people started coming to you for jobs? Is that it?

JH: Well, we pursued some people, and some people asked for jobs. We knew people that were good welders, good mechanics.

RS: Some of them were former Bethlehem Steel people?

JH: Right. And some of them were still, in other words, were still working at the Bethlehem plant, say at the mineral wool plant that was still in Bethlehem's operation, but we were working a second job, okay? And not only did we start setting up the slag plant operation to help them move it, we also did a lot of maintenance and repairs at the pelletizer. It was an operation that Waylite Corporation was allowed to do down at the blast furnace. We used to rebuild the shaker tables and the spinners themselves. They were water-cooled spinners. The hot slag would flow down, across the shaker table, and they'd put sprays of water --

RS: [00:40:00] I know exactly what you're talking about. What happened to Bethlehem's people?

JH: (The partner?) --

MD: I was just going to ask about (inaudible) --

JH: -- well see, Bethlehem Steel never did that, never had a pelletizing operation.

RS: So Waylite -

JH: Waylite, again, with Bethlehem, you know, came up with this operation. In other words, the Waylite was allowed to do the pelletization in here where they used to do something similar out at their physical site in the plant. In other words, they must have leased land and every so often, they would bring hot ladles of slag, and they'd run it through an operation that they would make Waylite out of it.

Now, this pelletization application was a little bit different. It was coming right off the furnace. All they'd do was divert the trough and run it across this pelletizer, but the high heat and the water caused the separation of the hydrogen, which causes the explosion.

[00:41:00] Because of the temperature, they separated the hydrogen, and then it caused it to explode. That's why they had so much rumbling and thunder and, because of the noise, the ER caused them to shut down the operation of the blast furnace eventually. It was basically mostly because of the noise in the city.

RS: Noise, yeah. And then, what year did you decide to go full time? After you left -- after Bethlehem Steel, I mean?

JH: Basically, it was -- in other words, we had several -- we might have had two or three full-time employees working for

us maybe, say, within the last six months of our employment with Bethlehem. We knew that the deadline was coming close for this sale. I mean, it wasn't like it was something that was happening overnight. [00:42:00] And it wasn't like we decided six months earlier that we were going to do this for sure full time. We were really waiting till the last minute to make a decision whether we were going to go with the business or we were going to go with this new company. The thing is the new company wasn't telling you -- putting all their cards on the table.

RS: What do you mean by that?

JH: You know, as far as benefits. Instead of them coming in and talking to you directly, they'd have a person that's employed by Bethlehem talking to you. In other words, like the plant manager. He'd come down and say -- well, he was already told he has a job, but he'd come down and say to you, "Well, the new company would like to hire you."

RS: Yeah, so what are they gonna do.

JH: "They'll hire you at your same salary. They don't know what the benefits are going to be yet, but you're going to have some benefits."

RS: It was vague.

JH: [00:43:00] Vague, exactly. In other words, for the people that they wanted, they'd tell them they had a job, they had the same salary. You know, I'm talking about managing people. But as far as the benefits, medical benefits, pension --

RS: They didn't tell you.

JH: -- there's nothing on the table. Nothing in writing. Nothing really verbally either, other than, "We're going to have something."

RS: So that's really the reason you decided not to go over there?

JH: Yeah, it was really just too vague of a transition, to drop, you know, something that we felt that we could continue.

RS: Are they still here, by the way, in business? Is that company still in business?

JH: It's under another name. It's the same company, but Broyhill decided to make it a separate entity. It's called Mineral Fiber Specialists, but it's an entity in itself.

[00:44:00] And the plant manager that was controlling the plant when I left Bethlehem is now the president of Mineral Fiber Specialists. He might be -- I'm sure he has an interest in the company himself.



RS: Those last years when you were at Bethlehem Steel, you mentioned earlier on you had a giveback, in effect a salary cut when you started out. Did you experience any growth in your salaries over that time, or was it one of those flat levels?

JH: Soon after that, there was, minimal, like, a minimal increase.

RS: In other words, you weren't keeping up with the cost of living, say, or inflation?

JH: No, no.

RS: So you felt you were falling behind?

JH: Yeah.

RS: Okay, was this true of most people in your position?

JH: Yes.

RS: Okay. Well I know it was true of the union people because--

JH: (voices overlapping) People that were my peers --

JH: And again, the union was, you know, reaching a plateau.

RS: [00:45:00] Right. These were years when the union wasn't good. The union wages weren't increasing either.

JH: No, not significantly, especially, like, the last contracts. While we were there, there were no increases.

RS: Well now, Bethlehem went through a whole series of -- from the late -- from about the mid-'70s on, Bethlehem went through a whole series of chairmen, or CEOs.

JH: Uh-huh.

RS: They didn't make any real difference? In other words --

JH: No.

RS: -- in the way the company was managed, as far as you could see?

JH: Even like, they brought [name redacted] in to make all these major changes, and he was the accountant person they brought in, but again, you can't have person that's an accountant run a major industry without -- not having a technical knowledge or a good basic knowledge of the operations and how they function, and how one affects the other. [00:46:00] It's just not a healthy item to do in any industry. You can't send an accountant into the automakers' manufacturing operation.

RS: At any time in those years, in the eighties, did top managers, vice presidents, CEOs come down into the floor to talk to the men?

JH: I've never seen any of them really.

RS: So in other words, they really remained remote.

JH: Right. In other words, I've seen only like the division -- manager of the mining division and, again, he was the one person that ended up being a major card player in the sale of the -- of the division sale.

RS: His name wasn't McDonald, was it?

JH: No, it was -- [00:47:00] [name redacted].

RS: All right. After you - ah, it's getting late, I don't want to keep you up for, Hell, all night here. After you decided then to go with your own company, you went full time, you obviously had been, I would say, fairly successful, even through a recession, but all of this must have been a hell of a kind of wrenching experience. In other words, what kind of feelings do you have about all those years you spent at Bethlehem Steel and then having to start all over again? It looked like you have been successful so far. It still must have been difficult.

JH: Yeah.

RS: How do you feel about that? Wow.

JH: Initially, it was a little difficult. [00:48:00] You know, you end up putting in lot of hours in and you end up doing a lot of work yourself. I mean, it's difficult to find good quality people, and one thing is even employees that you would hire on that were previously employed by

Bethlehem, there was a -- how do you say it -- a little bit more of a lax attitude, especially like with people that maybe were like in our maintenance operation. In other words, you put in your eight hours of work, but they'd go to have a coffee break, or they'd get lost for a little while. You know, one or two guys would be up on a job site and another guy would take a walk for a while. It's not like there wasn't work going on all the time or like there was major hours when there was no work going on.

RS: [00:49:00] Right.

JH: But when you would hire somebody that was used to that environment, and you're in a competitive environment where you're a service company now, you have to perform so much work, or accomplish so much work if you're working on a bid basis. If you have guys that would come and work for a while, and then they want to sit down and have a cup of coffee for 15 minutes, and then they make it 20 minutes or a half-an-hour, you have to start saying something to them because if they're not working, you're not making any money, or if they're not working, you're losing money.

In other words, if I bid a job to do the work in eight hours and they put in four hours' worth of work the first

day but I have to pay them for eight hours of work, that means I have to go out there another day and maybe put two days' worth of work. And the thing is when you're doing bid work, the companies that you're bidding to know how long it takes to do these jobs, so you can't go overbidding because they're competitive too.

RS: [00:50:00] So this has been a kind of problem you've had?

JH: To some degree. It's made us stay with the minimum amount of employees, probably that are with Bethlehem. Right now, we have one welder that's been with us from the beginning with Bethlehem, and it was difficult for him to make the transition.

RS: It was?

JH: And we just hired another employee that worked with us in the operation. And we just hired him just now. Just this summer, and now we're talking since we went full time, it's now '92. Four years he had worked as a mechanic at different operations. Now, we're using him as a field serviceman and as a truck driver, but he's much different now after he's been employed at several other places. He's realized that it's not the same as it was --

RS: With Bethlehem Steel?

JH: -- with Bethlehem Steel. [00:51:00] But we don't have that many employees with us that had worked for Bethlehem anymore.

RS: You made a remark, you said it's hard to get good help, it's hard to find anybody --

JH: Even kids, or men that are trained welders that have gone to school, welding is a technical skill and a steady hand, and knowing applications, maintenance applications, and how to utilize that knowledge is something that's important. You can find people that can weld two pieces of metal together but finding ones that do it to the best degree or high quality are few and far between. [00:52:00] It's not that easy to find.

RS: Why is that?

JH: You can find -- I tell you what. As time goes on, I don't feel like the younger guys have the same work ethic, number one.

RS: You know, you're the third guy in the last week who said that?

JH: Really?

RS: Yeah, yeah. That's interesting. Why do you feel that way?

JH: I don't think a lot of the younger kids just had to work from the time they were young. They've only started to

learn to work once they got out of school or something like that, maybe did minimal amount of work at home.

RS: So they were privileged, in other words?

JH: Yeah, right.

RS: You find it's difficult for them to adapt to working.

JH: You know, when I was a kid, we had to work. If it wasn't around the house, it was on my grandfather's farm. You know, we had to pull our weight. I mean, it was just understood. You know, we always helped. That's the way it was. [00:53:00] We never complained because we thought everybody did it.

RS: Now, it's different?

JH: Exactly. Especially like I say with younger kids. We do have some older guys. I just hired an older welder that is really an excellent, excellent welder. You know, we use him as a supervisor. Another guy that's around our age is a very highly skilled supervisor. Every once in a while, we'll get a young guy that's pretty good, but as kids -- as people -- as these men get younger -- as our employees get younger, you can see the difference between the boys or men that want to work versus boys that want to play, or don't want to work.

RS: Well, that doesn't sound too good for the future.

JH: [00:54:00] Well, the future looks good. The future looks, you know -- as far as the future goes, you know, we have to do something as far as educating and, you know, job training more, really.

RS: Even in this kind of industrial-type thing?

JH: I mean in this country.

RS: Yeah, okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you think there should be some sort of reindustrialization policy? An effort, a need to get these basic industries back on --

JH: I think, you know, America has to invest some money in the basic industry. I mean, this country can't survive as a service country.

MD: We've heard that twenty times before.

RS: Well, that's true.

JH: Unless we start doing some rethinking of basics economically, other countries are going to buy America away unless we start doing something. [00:55:00] I mean, we're investing more money, it seems, in foreign countries than we are in our own.

RS: You'd favor, then, a policy that --

JH: That controlled foreign spending.

RS: -- controlled foreign investment, foreign spending.

JH: Foreign investment, exactly.



RS: You'd favor import controls too, to some extent?

JH: Exactly.

RS: Are a lot of the materials you use foreign or US-made?

JH: Whenever possible, we buy domestic. You know, the more I think about it, I wouldn't buy another foreign car. I mean, my wife bought one in '82, but I have an American car, and I think more American.

RS: Okay, okay, good.

JH: You know, you have to. [00:56:00] If we could get more people to think that way, America would be a lot better off.

RS: Martin, have any questions?

MD: No, no, I don't. He's answering everything I thought I would ask.

RS: Oh, okay. You need to take some more photos.

MD: I haven't taken one yet. I was listening to him.

RS: You haven't taken one?

MD: No.

RS: What the hell have you been doing here?

MD: Listening, listening.

RS: Man has to go work tomorrow. (laughs)

MD: It will take a quarter of a second.

RS: Oh, alright. Good, Jim. Thanks.

END OF AUDIO FILE