

Anonymous_19920605

RICHARD SHARPLESS: This is an interview with [name redacted] and your address is (voices overlapping) 125 Raubsville Road, Easton, PA.

ANONYMOUS: One, eight, Oh, four, two, seven.

RS: And this is Tuesday, October the 27th, 1992. First thing -- the most embarrassing question of all -- how old are you?

ANON: (laughs) I'm 57.

RS: Fifty-seven, okay. And you're a native of what?

ANON: I'm a native of Easton, I was born and raised in Easton. I was born in Easton hospital -- I was born and raised in Palmer Township.

RS: So, you've lived your whole life--

ANON: Right, lived my whole life here. I saw Palmer Township go from all strictly farms to a massive --

RS: Town.

ANON: Yeah, right. And I saw the quiet farmer [00:01:00] and I went from there and saw, all of a sudden in 1949, a gentleman by the name of Morris [Wulzer?] come in from New York and started mass producing houses at 6,999 dollars, which is [Wilton Acres?] and that was a big thing. And I will tell you, that was the start of this area on the mass

production basis because, you know, before that, well, I think we were kind of laid back a little bit. We were -- well not laid back, but what we did -- I know from my experience -- what we did, was strictly -- there was more pride and more precision taken in what you did. I learned the carpenter trade. [00:02:00]

RS: When did you start by the way?

ANON: When did I start? I started when I was a kid. I used to go -- my father, okay, come from Europe, he come from Germany and he learned his trade over there.

RS: He was a carpenter?

ANON: Yup, a carpenter and cabinet maker. And he learned his trade over there and he come to this country in 1919 and he went to work and he got a job right away, it was no problem because he come over here as a full-fledged craftsman and that's when they were, you know, building some of even College Hill homes.

RS: Right, after the war.

ANON: That's right, yup that's right. And he come here and work for some very reputable people, like the one I remember him talking a lot about was Billy Sneider, which had a reputation here and he did a lot of work on College Hill [00:03:00] and then he worked for a gentleman by the name of Frank Klein over here on South Side. He went to work

and worked for them two over a period of ten years until all of a sudden, the Depression hit. When the Depression hit, them people didn't have too much work. So, my father was just fortunate enough to be that talented that he went to the Bloomsbury Mountain, and he started working for some of these farmers that naturally made it through the Depression. And he--

RS: Was he doing carpentry or was he--

ANON: Yep, yeah, oh yeah, the first thing he did over there on his own was build a big barn. Somebody started a barn, you know, the old pegging process, okay, with the old -- the wall and the pegs and stuff? Well, he was geared up to do stuff--

RS: He knew how to do that? [00:04:00]

ANON: Yeah, he knew how to do that. In fact, we still have the -- well I don't -- but we have the machine accessible to us if we ever need it. But anyway, he built a barn for people by the name of Blessing up on Bloomsbury Mountain. And then from there he went to work and there was a senator's son, I think he was, by the name of Ernest Myler. And this Ernest Myler was a guy that was wealthy at the time, he was a wealthy man. He had a lot to do with the plastic coating on Dixie cups, okay? And, so naturally, my dad went to work, and they met up with one another. [00:05:00] And,

this Mr. Myler there, on Bloomsbury Mountain -- in fact they named the road after him, it's Myler Road. Well, it's actually in Holland Township, you can go two ways to get to this estate, and my dad remodeled that estate. And that was quite -- he spent around a hundred thousand dollars.

RS: That was a lot of money in the thirties.

ANON: That was a lot, a lot, a lot of money at that time.

RS: So that's how your father got through?

ANON: That's -- well, yeah, he did that job, then he built another home for a guy that -- this pencil factory in Bloomsbury.

RS: Koh-I-Noor?

ANON: Koh-I-Noor.

RS: Koh-I-Noor.

ANON: Okay, so from one job, he just went to the other and he built, in fact he built two or three homes for those people in Bloomsbury Mountain [00:06:00]. Different employees of the company. And his reputation, you know, itself, I mean, the display that he performed as far as his workmanship goes, you know, really, really -- that meant something at that time. And from there he come back here to Easton and maybe you know of a gentleman by the -- or maybe you've heard of a guy by the name of Louie Oberhofer. Louie

Oberhofer built (phone rings), he had a little spot on
College Hill -- (phone rings)

[INTERRUPTION]

ANON: -- he in turn, on College Hill, built Louis Oberhofer's
first big place, it was called the Forks Valley Tavern.
Forks Valley Tavern. [00:07:00] It was an exclusive place
-- it's still there. It's the one -- when you go up over
hill 115 and you go -- you hit the two lights, okay, you
continue straight through, okay, on the left-hand side, you
know where [Samon's Cable] is? Right next door, that
building?

RS: Oh, that fancy building?

ANON: Oh yeah, okay, my father built that--

RS: It's a unique building, it's interesting.

ANON: -- and at the same token, he met Bill Eisenhart, which you
know that name. But anyway, he built that building and it
seemed from that point on [00:08:00] -- I mean he never,
never was without work. He worked for some of the most --
well maybe I'm getting a little ahead of my story here.
When he built that, and he met Mr. Eisenhart and at first
Mr. Eisenhart told Louie Oberhofer that he couldn't build
it, but then down the road a little bit Bill Eisenhart made
the comment that -- this was long after he finished that

place -- it was quite a bit after that my father used to do a lot of work for Mr. Eisenhart, his sister's place--

RS: Was your father working alone? Or did he have...

ANON: No, he had men. He had some men.

RS: So actually, he had started like, sort of a company by now.

ANON: That's right. Yeah, now it's -- well he didn't incorporate -- you didn't do things like that at that time --

RS: No, but he did have a crew and everything.

ANON: Yeah, he hired -- [00:09:00] he had some carpenters, he had some real good carpenters -- in fact, one carpenter he had is building the lot in that Bernardsville area, very, very reputable man. By name of [Grief?]. But anyway, he did a lot of work for Eisenhart, and Eisenhart really, really said he's -- I mean he never told him to his face, because the two of them used to argue a lot, because one was as smart as the other one was, and so they used to get into their spats, but Bill Eisenhart always said that he never has seen a man so -- I mean, a carpenter as good as my father. But he learned the trade over there. When you learn something on the other side -- I always say that.

RS: Started as an apprentice and (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

ANON: That's right. You serve your apprentice -- [00:10:00] and not only do you have to serve your apprenticeship before they give you your documents. With anything, with anything they do over there.

RS: Mercedes-Benz still does that today.

ANON: That's right. And that's why they're so much smarter and so much--

RS: The quality.

ANON: That's right. Quality, architects, engineers, they develop the same way.

RS: So how did you get into it then?

ANON: Well, and then, he built -- he come -- Louie Oberhofer, when the second World War started, and they had gas rationing, what happened was Louie, that big place up there -- I mean it was humongous. And that needed a lot of people to keep it going, even though Louie had money, he couldn't afford to let it set. So, what he did, he beat the system. When gas rationing was [00:11:00] there -- I mean it was a big deal to run from Easton up to Forks Township at that time -- that was a big deal. Because I guess the allocations -- I mean, I was still small -- I remember gas rationing. I guess you were --

RS: Coupons.

ANON: Yeah, coupons. You were allocated so much gas and that was it. And so, Louie come down Easton here and then we built The Manhattan Restaurant.

RS: Right on the square.

ANON: Right on the square.

RS: Where [Charlie's?] is now.

ANON: Yeah, that's it.

RS: That was a great restaurant.

ANON: Oh man.

RS: It was beautiful.

ANON: Rich, I want to tell you something. That's one of the first places that I actually -- I was young then, but I used to go there and clean up and I used to do this. And then he'd let me start laying old floor, you know, and I got into this.

RS: That was the so-called "art deco" style they really had, [00:12:00] the booths and everything.

ANON: Oh yeah, I mean that was -- you know what, the really -- the finishing touches to it was the people that did the Waldorf Astoria come in and put all the cloth up. That ceiling, you see that double tiered ceiling?

RS: The ceiling with the chandelier.

ANON: That's right, that chandelier, that's worth more than the building is today, to be honest with you.

RS: I'm sure.

ANON: Oh yeah. But the cloth, and the design of the place, now there was an architect that designed it from Phillipsburg, but my dad and --

RS: So, he built that?

ANON: He built that.

RS: What year was that?

ANON: '41.

RS: '41.

ANON: Yeah, that was in '41.

RS: So, it was just at the start of the war.

ANON: That's right. And, you know, I was a young kid and I remember that. And I remember that thing being done, and I remember we used to go down there even after it opened up, and man, even during the day, [00:13:00] you know -- I mean that place was jammed.

RS: That was the place to go, I guess.

ANON: Oh, sure. Oh sure. Well then -- you know, from that -- even that point on, my father just worked for Mr. Gerstell, the old Alpha Portland Cement Company, worked for Hugh Moore Senior, Hugh Moore Junior, in fact it's Jason that comes to the store.

RS: Yeah, he's his uncle. Hugh Moore Jr.

ANON: No, that's his grandfather.

RS: Grandfather?

ANON: Yeah, that's his grandfather.

RS: Thought that was his...Okay.

ANON: Okay, we built his father's house. His father was an architect. We did an awful lot of work for his father. And we worked for [Ken Cresser?], Ken Cresser worked for Miller. We worked for a couple doctors in College Hill [00:14:00], we worked for [Mr. Reinich?], which was absolutely the most meticulous person that I've ever, ever seen besides my dad. I mean he was meticulous, and he -- anything on the interior of that home up there, my dad had to do it. Nobody else could touch it. And we did a lot of work at his [rope?]. You know, rope?

RS: Yeah, right. So, you had a good reputation?

ANON: Oh, yeah. And Harvey Mack we worked for. My dad -- this was a little bit before my time -- he got in with the Chipmans. And he worked with the Chipmans from the knitting mill, he worked for the Schumans that owned Lehigh Foundries, he worked for the Rices that owned General Crushed Stone. I mean, this is the type of clientele he had, and he was always, always, always busy. Always had enough to do, but he wouldn't do [00:15:00] things on the mass production basis. It was strictly, I mean, it was --

RS: Custom.

ANON: Custom, not only custom, it was precision. I mean, we did some of the most ridiculous things, I mean, if I ever tell people today what we used to do, they'd think we were nuts. One time we started a house out in Country Club Estates, behind the country -- by the way my dad helped build the Country Club, the original Country Club and Old John Scheibel's home. I want to back up a little bit and say between 1919 and 1929, these guys -- he worked for a guy by the name of Billy Sneider, and my father couldn't speak English too well. Well naturally, these guys -- in fact one of the guys, the guy that was [00:16:00] the superintendent of the job was -- remember this Buzz Fox up here in the hill? It was his father. It was his father that was the superintendent on the job. And they come to this roof, this house roof and garage roof over there at Mr. John Scheibel's, the original John Scheibel that started the bakery, his house on Northampton Street. And these guys were supposedly to be America's best, okay? They could not figure out this roof. It was what they called a "varied pitch hip roof" with equal overhang and equal pitch, where the overhangs met all the way around and the hip roof goes at an angle and stuff. It was really -- it is -- it isn't complicated to me anymore because [00:17:00] I know it like the back of my hand, but anybody

that's in this business -- I mean 99 percent of the guys they wouldn't even begin to know where to start to do something like that. But anyway, these Dutchmans were trying to figure out this roof. So, my dad was there, and he knew how to do it. But he couldn't tell these guys how to do it because he couldn't speak English. So, what had happened -- my mother told me this one. He come home, one night, and he made a little replica of it.

RS: Made a model?

ANON: Made a model of it. Made a little model of it.

RS: (laughs)

ANON: And he took it back there and he tried to demonstrate it that way, and they didn't--

RS: Didn't get it.

ANON: They didn't get get it. They didn't know. So, he went to work, and he did it. [00:18:00]

RS: Did it himself.

ANON: Yep, but from that point on they never called him a "dumb Dutchman." In fact, they had a lot of respect for him after that, you know. Well, when you learn something over there on the other side, you either learn or get out of it -- it's that simple.

RS: So, he brought you into it then?

ANON: Yeah, so it was a natural thing for me, I guess -- my brother was in it.

RS: Yeah, I was going to ask, do you have any brothers?

ANON: Yeah, I have a brother. He's ten years older than I am, and he worked for my father. And they worked together for a long, long time. And my father used to get a little bit carried -- like I said before -- little bit carried away with himself. So we were starting this house [coughs] out there behind the country club, and I'll never forget this as long as I live. [00:19:00] You know these port-a-johnnies -- the outhouses they have today? Well he had one of them made, a portable job, so when we'd go on a job, we wouldn't have to run off to go to the bathroom or anything. So, the first thing we did was put this thing up. My brother and I were putting this thing up, and my dad come driving down the road -- and this was rare -- my dad come driving right across the lot, and he usually wouldn't do that with his truck, because his truck was neat as a pin. But he did, he stopped his truck, he got out of it, and my brother and I were there, and he said to us, "That thing is out of level."

RS: (laughs)

ANON: My brother got so mad he just threw his tools -- which is a rare occasion -- in the trunk, closed the trunk, and drove off.

RS: (laughs)

ANON: And my dad said to me, [00:20:00] "What's wrong with him?". But that's the way we used to work -- I mean, with precision. We really did. I mean everything had to be done to perfection. It'd take us nine months to build a house, but it was done. We didn't spare anything anywhere. Anybody today, if I'd ever tell them that we used to fit rafters with a block plane -- I mean they'd think we're nuts. But I --

RS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) They don't do that anymore, they come from a factory.

ANON: Yeah, yeah. But when they went up against the (inaudible) he made us put them up there. That's how we had to be: precise, precision. There was no... eighth quarters. You had to be on and that was it, that's the way it was, that's the way he was taught.

RS: How old were you when you started working?

ANON: Oh, man, Jesus I was -- hell. Oh, he built Neuweilers [00:21:00] -- or Detweilers -- Neuweiler, she was a Neuweiler which was--

RS: The brewery.

ANON: Yup, the brewery. And he was a Detweiler, which Detweiler owned Russ', the building Russ owns. That's where I really started. That was in '48. That's when I really got active in it and started working then.

RS: So early, about 14, 13.

ANON: Yeah, yep. That's when I -- I was going to school. I used to do summer and after work I used to go, you know, a lot of times and I'd meet him and I'd do what I could do. And that's where I really, really, really, really started using the hand tools and we cut -- I'll never forget on that house that we built for Neuweiler, or Detweiler -- we cut the roof out by hand. [00:22:00] Me and Buzzy -- Buzz Fox worked for us at that time then.

RS: Cut out the whole roof?

ANON: Yeah, we the whole roof by hand and my dad come with a new Porter-Cable power saw, an eight-inch power saw, and I still have the power saw today, and it's still -- it's basically the same shape that it was when he brought it on the job.

RS: So, it was good.

ANON: Yep, and that's how good -- that's how the difference is in quality they used to make years ago versus today. But when we did things, years ago, it was done with -- I mean, it was -- it wasn't the attitude "hurry up and get the job

done, and how much money I can make." Let's give these people a good, good day's work, and at the same token, let's really, really, put the pride in it. And that's the way I was taught, and I worked [00:23:00] for him for quite a while, till 57 or so, and then he went back to Europe, him and my mom, just for vacation for a while, and I went out and started doing some little things on my own, you know? And then one day Tom Sherman comes to me, which was Sherman Construction of Easton.

RS: In Palmer Township, right?

ANON: Right, okay. And he come to me and he knew what type of background I come, and we have the same last name -- mine's spelled a little different than his -- but we pronounced it basically the same. And then I went to work for him, and it was only going to be a temporary deal, he wanted me to build some radiator covers and do some pretty fancy work. Well, he kind of, you know, hung onto me, and Christ, [00:24:00] I worked for him for twenty-two years.

RS: Twenty-two years?

ANON: Yep, twenty-two years I worked for him. So, I have background on the precision end of it, and really there was a code of ethics on what you did. I mean, there was actually a trade, there was ways that you did things. And,

I mean, somewhere along the line they got lost in the shuffle.

RS: I'm interested in that. When do you think this began to happen? When they start mass producing these houses?

ANON: Yep, yep, when the mass production -- and when I saw it really start (phone rings) -- what was happening, like there was the -- like Sherman, [00:25:00] he actually worked for this Morris [Wulzer?], that brought mass production into the area, so he only knew the mass production way. And this Morris [Wulzer?] was a New York lawyer, okay? Now, he was no more a builder than the man in the moon. See, you didn't have too much of outsiders getting into the building business. When you were a builder years ago, you were a builder and you knew your trade. But then, after that lawyer -- then he hires -- he so-called hires this personnel that knows a little something about the business and then they decide that, man they can run things cost-efficient by subletting...

RS: Right, jobs.

ANON: Jobs. And when that subletting come into effect [00:26:00] is when the change started. It started and--

RS: Was this in the fifties it started?

ANON: It was in the--

RS: The sixties?

ANON: Well, it was yeah, it was in the sixties. Actually, it started out like in '58, '59 and just continued through from that point and it just got worse and worse all the time. But it was just a case of where, you know, they'd pay so much to do a job, and then these guys -- these subs -- would try to beat the time on doing it so they could get another one started. So naturally the faster they went, the more money they made. And that's when really the pride and the precision work and [00:27:00] even the ethics just dropped off. Just disappeared. It just vanished.

RS: Do you think this is true in other trades as well?

ANON: Yeah, I think it's true -- roofing. I mean the guys that we have out here today for roofers -- there's actually only two guys I know of in this area that are real, real roofers. And you know what? They're struggling to make a living but yet they're top shelf people, and one is Billy Bachman. I mean, there's nobody better. He knows the roofing business. There is a right and a wrong way. There is. But they come out with these asphalt shingles and anybody, everybody and their brothers nail them on the roof [00:28:00], and again with no pride, you know, a lot of them don't take any pride in what the heck they do.

RS: I noticed a lot of -- I don't know whether it's me or what -- I noticed a lot of more people with construction company

signs on their trucks. Is this true, is there more people getting into the business? What's happening there?

ANON: Yeah, yeah, what's happening is these guys now that were subs decide, "What the hell, if we're doing this, we might as well do it on our own. We can make more money." Well, God bless them.

RS: Seems to be a lot of them.

ANON: There is, and it's getting worse by the day. They pop out of the woodwork, especially when times get tough.

RS: Yeah, well that was my next question, is this related to the tough times?

ANON: It's partially related to the tough times. [00:29:00]

Remember years ago when Bethlehem Steel, they used to lay off people? Then all of a sudden, they're all painters.

Okay? Every one of them is a painter. They're earning big money up at Bethlehem Steel, and they turn around and go out and get these jobs, they underbid the legitimate painters that do a good, decent job, okay? And, it's just not fair, it's just not...

RS: And hire kids like me in college.

ANON: Yeah, no, okay.

RS: That's what I did, I painted houses. (laughs)

ANON: And that seemed to be -- see, that's where the ethics got away from the whole thing. I mean I worked with old

Italian stonemasons -- I mean, these men were artists.

[00:30:00] I worked with painters that were artists. You know how many are around that are real, real painters?

RS: Very few, I'd imagine.

ANON: Very, very, few. There's only -- if you ask me who the best is in the area, okay, there's only two names I could really give you. One is Don [Kirbol?] and the other is Dick Walders.

RS: Yeah, I know Walders.

ANON: Now, them two guys, I mean, are top shelf men. But you take these other guys around, oh my God, I mean 99 percent of these guys never really learned, they don't know the difference between sash brushes and a different brush for the trim and a different brush for, you know, when you paint baseboards. I mean, years ago, [00:31:00] I saw where they come with their paint cans and the holes drilled through the brushes, and they used to hang them at night in the can to keep them nice and soft, and they keep them clean, and there was a brush for everything. And these old painters used to mix the paint right on the job. If you wanted a special color, they could come up with it. Yeah, but --

RS: You think mass production techniques in building has had anything to do with all this, in other words?

ANON: The mass production in building and the technology in building, there's -- it's a -- how can I, I want to put this in a proper phrase [00:32:00]. As far as framing and -- the only improvements that I've seen in the building industry as far as the technology or anything else goes, we're using a little better insulation today. But we're over-insulating, number one.

RS: Yeah, that's creating problems that way.

ANON: And it's creating a lot of problems and we're going to have a lot more problems. I haven't done anything in the last three years as far as work, I just can't, I can't stand too long to even do anything. But anyways, I go around and I snoop around and watch what's going on. My son got involved with a few rip-offs, and tearing things out and wondering what's wrong -- and in fact, he's involved with one right now, where had a case of over-insulating [00:33:00] and it just destroyed the roofboards, it destroyed--

RS: You got a lot of moisture (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

ANON: Sure. What they're doing, they're trapping the moisture in there. You know, a house has got to breathe, like you and I have to. If you wrap us too tight, we're going to choke to death. But they did improve on -- from when I

started, they did improve on the insulation. They did do that.

RS: How about all this plastic piping?

ANON: I want to tell you something. We used to use cast iron -- they used to use cast iron for drainage and they used to use a lot of galvanized for water, which actually, to be honest with you, with some of these water conditions, that used to hold up longer than some of this copper that we use today. Plastic today -- I mean really, is it holding up?
[00:34:00] We don't know yet.

RS: Yeah, we don't know yet. We've got to wait and see.

ANON: That's right. We can't use it for water lines, because it can't stand pressure. But the drainage might be okay if it's done neat and properly and hung properly. See, plastic is very weak. If you get any type of temperature, or rise in temperature, that stuff in the 20-foot span will have its tendency to sag and if it's not hung properly like half the other things they're doing today, you know, hurry up and get it done, I mean, it could give you problems down the road.

RS: So, you attribute this kind of thing to -- well first of all, the desire to make a buck, well, a quick buck.

ANON: The attitude--

RS: The attitude. Do you think the fact that there was so much construction in the 50's, 60's, and even early 70's added to that? You know, this demand -- the population was expanding [00:35:00] really rapidly and houses -- the demand for houses really grew.

ANON: The technique of selling it was different. They brought some techniques aboard that, yeah, yeah...

RS: See, because what you're saying is true of every other industry. People who make automobiles say the same thing, people who make steel say the same thing. In other words, the standard's deteriorated, the quality went down and people, general workers didn't give a damn.

ANON: That's right. Exactly right. And it's the same way in this industry. I can see it. Every day of the week when I snoop around and see things and I look at things and the way they're done, it turns my stomach. The older I'm getting, the worse I'm getting by looking at things.

RS: What about the last, say, 15 years? You know, during this time of -- I'm really interested when we see the whole country [00:36:00], the whole economy starting to decline -- the industrial economy. Steel mills starting to close down, auto factories... What about in this period of time? You notice this same sort of thing happening?

ANON: I noticed, like you just made a comment that everybody and their brother is in the business. All of a sudden, you're a car salesman and you're out there building houses. Now what the heck do you know about building a house?

RS: That was a question -- do these people know anything?

ANON: No, no. I mean what they do, they go out and hire the subs to do this, but how do they know what they're looking at?

RS: Right, do the subs know?

ANON: Well, that's the next thing. Do subs -- hey, you don't think the subs are going to cut them a break, do you?

RS: No.

ANON: I mean, especially when they know that the guy don't know anything. [00:37:0] And then these guys go around -- some of these guys, they'll hammer -- they'll go around all, "I can get this done cheaper, that done cheaper," so you know what that does to it. All you're doing is inducing the whole thing to have a piece of garbage. And these guys are out here building houses -- when the good times are here, they're building houses. And then, all of a sudden, the rough times hit, and they're gone. Then good times start up again and here's another group coming out there, you know? They're out there, they're doing -- trying to build houses and they manage to get by. But they don't know what they're looking at. They have no idea. And you can even

look at some of these houses. You can look at some of them. I mean, just to give you a -- we'll keep this name and stuff out of it -- but [name redacted], I know [name redacted] pretty good, maybe you do too. We'll keep that name [00:38:00] out of the picture. But, he bought a house up here, up there, [Doc Walkman's Track?], right on the corner. And I went up and looked at it, he asked me to go take a look at it one day, and I went inside the house and the guy, I knew the guy that built it. Now the guy is no more a builder than the man in the moon, it's [name redacted] from over in Phillipsburg. Now, the uncle and sub are in the electrical business, they're in the heating business and this kid, you know, he never worked around the carpenter trade that long. Well, you go into this house and you look at it -- and you can see it, you go inside, and he went to open up the stairway. Well, I went in there and took one look -- I see why he has claustrophobia. And, I walk out on the front porch and I'm leaving, and I [00:39:00] look at this front porch railing and it's a bunch of two by fours nailed together. I mean, it's a disgrace. It's a disgrace to the building business. And stuff like that, I see that stuff and it just turns me right off.

RS: Is there any training for carp-- for building?

ANON: That is the major, major problem. I think that's the major problem in the country today. Like I told you, when my dad served apprenticeship, he had to number one, show interest. And, number one, that instructor knew the business. He worked at the business. He had his little necessary schooling to become an instructor. That's the problem here. We have these so called [00:40:00] -- I guess the Vo-Techs, etcetera and so forth.

RS: Yeah, what are they doing?

ANON: You know, they're not putting the proper personnel in there to train these people. I mean, how can you teach me something when you never did it before? You can have -- please, Rich, don't get offended by this. I know you're a professor, right, at the college?

RS: (Laughs) That's all right, go ahead.

ANON: Okay, but you can have all the degrees and all the diplomas in the world hanging on that wall.

RS: You need practical experience.

ANON: That's right. That there does not do you a bit of good when you come out here into the real, real world. And, that's where the Europeans got us all over. That's why they're so much smarter, and that's why their technology is so much greater than ours.

RS: That's why their standard of living is -- [00:41:00]

ANON: That's right. And they still believe in giving us -- they give you the work. They work. But they're trained, and they're trained properly. In other words, to become an engineer over there, you have to -- whatever type of field of engineering you're going into, you have to go out there and you have to work at it.

RS: That's right --

ANON: And if you're building automobiles --

RS: That's true of craftsmen as well--

ANON: That's right. It's the same thing. The architects, the bridge builders, those engineers, work at it first. And then they get the little necessary schooling they need to continue. And the schooling over here, our emphasis is all wrong. We're pushing for higher education, we don't need higher education, we need--

RS: Craftsmen.

ANON: That's right. [00:42:00] We need training. We need training programs. But we have to have the people, the proper people, to train these people. It's a good example right now that we got going on. Look at this guy from General Motors. That there is a good example. Now that man is running General Motors Corporation into the ground.

RS: Well, he inherited one (overlapping dialogue; inaudible). But you're right, he didn't help it.

ANON: That's right, he didn't help it. But that man -- now, they're going to go to work and put a guy temporarily in his place--

RS: Proctor and Gamble.

ANON: Yeah. That has no idea how to build a car. I mean, where is the logic behind this?

RS: I mean, think of the new guy in Bethlehem Steel.

ANON: That's right, there's another good example. [00:43:00]

RS: When you had men working for you, did you notice over the years any decline in quality in terms of their skill? In other words, were the younger guys -- I don't know how you were working. You worked for Sherman until what time?

ANON: Twenty-two years, but then at the last eight, nine years I was into management, and that's where I learned the management and the business end of it.

RS: Well, that's what I mean, did you notice the talent declining over that period of time?

ANON: Yeah. Yes, I did, because the older ones were getting out of it and they, more and less, you know, they had the attitude that they didn't want to teach also, you know. [00:44:00] The older ones didn't want to teach some of these young, smart, snotnoses. And I noticed that as being the problem. And some of these -- now I was fortunate

enough to be trained by somebody different, okay, that really knew their business.

RS: Well, that was sort of unusual.

ANON: Yeah, that's unusual. That is. But I worked with a lot of guys that, I mean, they depended on me for complicated roofs and stairs -- they really called themselves carpenters, and they wanted a quick dollar, but they didn't know how to do a lot of this stuff. And this is some of America's ways that just rub -- now they were decent, they were a lot better than what we got today. But today, they're just not learning anything.

RS: So, I could [00:45:00] go out and call myself a builder, right.

ANON: That's right, exactly right. That's today's way of doing things. Rich, this is all I got --

RS: There's no licensing --

ANON: No, there's no -- I don't even know if that would--

RS: Would do it. How about apprentice programs for kids?

ANON: Yeah.

RS: Do they exist?

ANON: No.

RS: They don't?

ANON: No, no. For example, these framers that I know around today, I mean they'll hire guys for three, four, five bucks

an hour. You know, what the hell good is that? I mean, these guys, you know, love wood, and the framer don't know that much, so what's he going to teach the guy that's working with him? It's a rare occasion to find somebody good enough on both ends, one to train and the other to learn. It's just a rare [00:46:00] occasion because the trade is getting more cruder. I mean some of these guys you see driving around today, I mean, they look like they let them out of Sing Sing or something, you know. And that's another appearance. And no tools. And when they do come to work and have some tools, I mean, they're thrown in the truck. I mean no -- Jesus Christ, when I was learning the trade and we went in and did things, we kept things neat and clean and our tools were in good shape. Our tools were all sharp, I mean, I had to have sharp tools. Man, if I didn't, I'd get a kick right in the ass, and I mean, I -- I did get my share of little butts here and there and learned, and learned that, you know, this is the way it's done and this is the way you do it. [00:47:00] And we're just not doing that.

RS: How about the unions?

ANON: I never got too involved with unions. I never -- I was always on a non-union basis.

RS: Were the building trades very strong around here, I guess--?

ANON: They were years ago, I guess. But then, they defined themselves. The union did the bigger stuff.

RS: Yeah, the major construction stuff.

ANON: That's right, that's right. And the non-unions did the smaller stuff. And they had their breaking point -- like Lafayette College. If they wanted to build a big addition--

RS: Yeah, they had to hire union workers.

ANON: Yeah, and a lot of the municipalities you have to either pay prevailing rate or be a union contractor, okay.

RS: How about the union carpenters, for example, were they any better?

ANON: No. No, than a real carpenter [00:48:00] out there in residential? No, they weren't any better. In fact, maybe some of them were a little worse.

RS: So, in other words--

ANON: If you were a carpenter and learned your trade properly you knew what you were doing. You could handle -- you could go to work for a union contractor and handle whatever job he gave you.

RS: Suppose a kid in school wants to become a carpenter.

ANON: That's a good question.

RS: Where does he go to learn it?

ANON: Believe me, there's only one guy in this whole, whole area that I know that I would even send anybody to learn anything. And he's the one that I mentioned to you that's down in the Long Valley area, in the Bernardsville area. Now wait a minute, I'm wrong. There is [00:49:00] the Hoffmans, Charlie Hoffman's son.

RS: They built my house.

ANON: They're good people.

RS: The Hoffman's built my house.

ANON: Did they? They know their business. The old man was good, okay.

RS: I never knew the old man. I knew the young guy.

ANON: Yeah, I knew the father. Now they are good people, they know their business. They're one of the few around that know their business. There used to be a guy from Phillipsburg, [Bob Fair?], okay? But these people don't exist anymore and even how to get a job with them. Like, for example, the Hoffman's, there's a good example. I mean, I presume they got their work but they're not near as busy -- no?

RS: Listen, I watched my house go up very closely and some of their men were good workers, were really on top of things, but they [00:50:00] subcontracted some of the stuff.

ANON: Oh well, when they've gotten subcontractors --

RS: The plumber who worked had a full-time job and did it on the side and reversed (phone rings) the hot and cold lines (laughs). You know --

[INTERRUPTION]

ANON: That's another trade that's actually lacking, well, they're all --

RS: You feel they're all the same way?

ANON: The electrical might be a little--

RS: That might be a little dangerous to not know what you're doing there.

ANON: Yeah, electrical's a little different, okay. But plumbing trade, roofing trade, well, plastering is gone. Stone masons, brick layers, they're real McCoy's, the precision work and the stucco work, I mean it's just, just, just not here.

RS: Do you think there should be some sort of regulation on this stuff, on quality? You think government, for example, [00:51:00] should get involved?

ANON: I think government should stay the hell out of it, to be honest with you. I really do.

RS: So, you don't think that would be the--

ANON: No, no, I think it's strictly the training programs, okay.

RS: Well how about the government, say, sponsors the training program.

ANON: Well, that would be -- as long as -- see, again, the government would go out and get people that have all these degrees and these -- necessary degrees and diplomas and everything else, and they're not the people you want to train these people. You've got to have people that know what they're doing to train these people. That's --

RS: You're describing a kind of vicious circle here. I mean, your -- there's not many people know how to really do first rate quality work.

ANON: There isn't many around.

RS: And on the other hand, how does the new generation get trained [00:52:00] to do it when there's nobody to train them?

ANON: That's true.

RS: So, you're talking about something that's going to contribute to the downward slide that's happening.

ANON: Yeah, yeah, it's -- I'm afraid we're not getting any better. I mean, it's just getting worse. It's getting worse by the year. It really is. The guys that think they're God almighty and good, they just -- they wouldn't make a pimple on a good mechanic's ass, to be honest with you, okay, that's plain and simple.

RS: That's another craft that's also deteriorating.

ANON: That's right.

RS: Well, you're not the first one I've talked to that's said this, you know, when talking about people. Many industries, trades, have said the same thing. How do we reverse this? Because, you know, we're going to go down the tubes. [00:53:00] In the 1960's we had the top paying nation in the country, we had the top wages in the world. Not in the country, in the world. Today we're ranked twelfth in the world. We're behind countries like Germany and Japan in income, in--

ANON: In everything.

RS: --wages, and what have you. There's a definite relationship between quality and income.

ANON: It's the attitude change, it's the greed. The attitude change, the greed. Our priorities with any business today -- big, I'm talking big business now, I see they're not concerned about the worker anymore. They're concerned about automation. They put automation in, and look what that alleviates [00:54:00] as far as jobs go.

RS: Eliminates jobs.

ANON: That's right, and they take that money instead of -- they might mass produce stuff today and they're not making the same quality as they are in Europe. They're really not --

RS: Oh, that's true.

ANON: -- they're not, they're nowhere near it. And what we're doing is taking that money that they make and they're transferring it to the upper levels, the CEO's. I mean, which are -- none of them, probably 90 percent of the CEO's in this country today are in a certain business that they don't know anything about.

RS: That's probably right.

ANON: They just don't know. And number two they're getting paid an astronomical--

RS: Sum of money.

ANON: That's right, and then they're looking for the stockholders, okay. [00:55:00] It's got to reverse itself somewhere, it's got to.

RS: I've had workers say to me that they and people they work with have the attitude that, well the company doesn't give a damn about them, so why should they give a damn?

ANON: From what I hear and my stepson-in-law -- or, my step-son, and he works at Vic, Victaulic, which used to be Lehigh Foundries, and I listen to him every once in a while, we get into that conversation. And he's in supervision, he's in that category and you know, he sees it another way. He sees it that some of the attitude of the men, [00:56:00] especially when they got a little union there behind him,

okay -- like for example things are really bad out here. I mean, we're in bad shape.

RS: Oh, that's true.

ANON: I mean we're in very bad shape. And anyway, they have the attitude that they're not going to concede to anything, because they feel that these corporations are making the big money. And, you know, they read some of these things, they hear about them and somewhere along the line that this has got to change drastically or we're not going to improve. We're not. I've seen my share of things. I've seen my share of, how can I even [00:57:00] say it. I've had my share of experiences. I had all the hard knocks that anybody would want. I went through some hard times in '80, '81. Hey, I almost lost this place.

RS: In the recession?

ANON: Yeah, the recession and high interest rates, okay, and then my ex took off on me and cleaned me out completely. I mean, I come home here one time, there's nothing here. I mean, everything was gone, even my bank accounts were gone. I was penniless. So, I kind of experienced myself, so many things. And in between these times I had, I didn't pay too much attention to what was going on out there, but at least, at least, I had my hands [00:58:00] that I could work and I did manage to pick up things and--

RS: Go on.

ANON: Yeah, go on.

RS: When did you -- after you left Sherman you started your own business --

ANON: Yeah, I started --

RS: -- what year was that?

ANON: That was in '78.

RS: '78.

ANON: Aw man, it got big. I mean I was bigger than he was. But it got to the point where it got a little bit too big and I was trying to do it myself with a one-man staff here, and I shouldn't have completely done that. And number two is it got a little out of hand, I got stuck by one person and then it just seemed to mushroom, you know what I mean, where I got too big, I had too many things on the go one time [00:59:00], and I was robbing Peter to pay Paul here and keeping things going.

RS: What were you doing, private? Building houses?

ANON: Yeah, I was building houses. I got into a pretty big situation, and then I was having -- I had quite a few on the go. It's not that I was really losing any money, because I knew how to keep cost control and all that stuff, I mean that I was well-versed, well-experienced at. It's just, I could go out there and I could run a 50-year house

building on your lot for somebody else, and I'd turn around and have the same situation for myself, okay, but I didn't have that one guy that was in front of me. It just seemed like I always needed that one guy in front of me, you know, just to take a little relief off of me. And that's what I had with Sherman that I didn't have [01:00:00] here. And then things really went backwards, and my wife really settled the rest -- man, it put me in a bad way. I mean I had my problems financially, which -- there was nothing I could do about it at the time, but I want to tell you one big thing. Never, never, never make a decision when you're in a situation like that. You cannot make any decisions when you've got a group of problems in your head, and you got the internal revenue chasing you, and you got all these other things. You can just not make a decision and make it properly. And then, I learned another thing about lawyers, okay. They [01:01:00] are the biggest thieves in the country. They are, they are the biggest thieves in the country. All they do is try to talk you into bankruptcies, okay. Corporation-wise, the corporation I was involved with did go under, but they tried to talk me into personal and I said no way. No, no way I would ever do it. Thank goodness I held my head together long enough to make that decision, because there's only one group of people that

wind up ahead with everything you do. Everything you do today. And the legal profession had something to do with a lot of things that are happening in the building industry too. By, you know, the problems, litigations and all this, they're the only ones [01:02:00] that wind up with anything. They come before the government, they come before the IRS, before anybody else. Number two, the IRS sold me down the river too. Yes they did. Yep.

RS: So you were --

ANON: I had my share of hard knocks, I did. It never happened again though, Rich. I'm sorry for some of the things, I'm sorry for some of the people that were involved. I wish I had to do it over again. I wish -- I really, to be honest with you, I had, at the end, it become to the point where I couldn't pay my bills. I myself, was taught to always -- that comes first. I would've taken the money that we had [01:03:00] and paid the bills, and I had assets -- I had a lot of assets. But between the lawyer and her -- got them. I wanted to liquidate them, pay the bills and be on an even keel. But she's the one that destroyed that. And I, to this day, I would never let a wife, or any relation, in those books, and let them have any type of control on the money, because--

RS: It doesn't work.

ANON: It doesn't work. It really doesn't work, Rich. I had a home, a summer home, I had a big boat, you know, and this stuff was mine. I had the property, I had the old [01:04:00] Fairview School -- Fairview, the Hay School.

RS: Hays. Hay -- Weathers --

ANON: The Fair -- I had, like I say, those tough times, '80, '81 -- well, '81 and '82.

RS: Well, that was a bad time--

ANON: It was.

RS: --for builders, anybody, at that particular time.

ANON: And then I thought well, maybe I can borrow, but the -- the interest rates would eat me alive.

RS: The interest rates went through the roof.

ANON: That's right, they just went through the roof. And it just destroyed us--

RS: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) double digits

ANON: That's right. Just destroyed -- just literally destroyed my company financially. And then my wife panicked, and she took off with every God darn thing that was left. So, there I was, sitting with a nickel -- lucky I had a nickel in my pocket. And I was almost -- she didn't make the mortgage payments on this house, and I was five months behind on mortgage payments.

RS: Oh Jesus, on top of everything.

ANON: On top of everything, and the IRS was chasing me, okay.

RS: But you survived. [01:05:00]

ANON: There was nothing here, I even had this -- a guy living here for a little bit that was going to buy it, after all these problems. But then he walked out. So then that gave me more problems, and what I did, I managed to get -- see it was in her name and my name, so I managed to get her to sign off and what I did -- I mean, everything she had, I said, "Look, keep it, as long as you sign off the house." So, once I got her to sign off the house my equity position was quite good -- I didn't owe that much money on this house, okay, and that's when then I went and had to borrow -- I put a second mortgage [01:06:00] on it and I paid -- I did pay most of -- a lot of the debtors off. Well, the secured ones, and I even paid some personal ones. But I still, there's a few I owe, and the worst part about this whole thing, Rich, which really upsets me more than anything. All my life, I worked hard, I paid my bills. But you have one little smear like that...

RS: It stays with you.

ANON: That's right. And it stays with you, it's not fair, it really isn't. But the one thing I can say -- I didn't go bankrupt personally -- I wouldn't. They tried to talk me into it, but I didn't and I still, to this day, have a

superior credit rating and it's not going to change.

[01:07:00] But that little thing -- and people that knew it, they still -- I still today have a problem with people talking about me, you know, and saying I don't pay my bills. It's not true. It's just not true. I'm the first one there with a checkbook to pay the bills. I am. Well, my kid's handling most of it but I still (inaudible) what's going on here.

RS: So, you recovered and you're still in the business, right?

ANON: Yeah. To a cert-- I'm still --

RS: You're not personally involved.

ANON: Yeah, personally [you have to admit?] because, this accident really put me -- thank goodness for insurance there, boy.

RS: Yeah, well I remember what happened.

ANON: Yeah, thank goodness that I'm fully covered with everything, so that's one good thing.

RS: How do you see the business, you know, the building -- you've been mostly involved in residential.

ANON: Yeah. [01:08:00] I did my share of commercial.

RS: Did you?

ANON: Yeah, I did my share.

RS: Over the last few years, you've had it really -- things are, as you said, things are really tough. What's been

happening to it? How do you see it? Somebody told me -- a realtor told me you can sell anything under a hundred thousand and over three hundred, but you can't sell anything in-between, which is where most houses are.

ANON: Well, I really haven't had that close of a hands-on situation. I have a friend in Summerville, New Jersey that took me for a ride one day down in Bernardsville and that area. That's how I discovered that this guy is building [01:09:00] down there, and when I first looked at these houses, I didn't see no signs at that time -- I said, "Man alive, somebody's in here that knows what they're doing." And then finally I saw a sign and I said "Jesus Christ and almighty, this guy worked for my father, and he learned the trade with him and now this is his son that's building at this point. This guy is trying." Once I get good enough to get on my -- you know, to really -- see, I can't climb, I can't go in holes, because I like to check on things. If I can't see what's going on, I get very, very concerned because I like to really stay on top of things. But anyway, maybe it'll happen that I get good enough again and I can really motivate, and he wants me to come down there and do the same type of thing that this guy's doing. So, if we [01:10:00] decide to get into that market, you know, that'll be a -- that's a real specialty. That's a real,

real specialty. I'm going to take a few minutes and show you some pictures. I'm going to show you pictures of a hand-crafted house that I built in Clinton, New Jersey. Just let me get these pictures. And this is the --

[INTERRUPTION]

ANON: A good question. That's a good, good question.

RS: Oh, wow. That's quite a house.

ANON: Yeah, that's a --

RS: Whew.

ANON: Huh?

RS: That's a beauty.

ANON: Yeah, we did that. I designed it.

RS: You designed it?

ANON: I designed it. All I had to do was -- actually, it was built in Jersey.

RS: It [01:11:00] looks like a house that was built in the turn of the century.

ANON: Right, that's exactly right. That's right. And it's of the era, oh my God. The Hunterdon County Paper wanted to do a big article on that thing, it was all the hand-crafting -- we made everything, everything, on that job. The only thing that I didn't make was the front porch columns and I should've made them, because I could've done a better job.

RS: Could've done it? Oh yeah?

ANON: Oh yeah. I could've done that. The circular stairways in there, you'll get to them. Everything was built there, piece by piece, including shutters, the back-porch details, the whole -- everything.

RS: Who was it built for?

ANON: It was built for a guy by name of Jack Schumacher.

RS: How long ago was this?

ANON: We built that in '80 [01:12:00] -- see in '81, or '82, I got the -- '82, yeah. In '83 I started doing little jobs on my own. You know, to put things back together after the big financial disaster. I did the bowling lanes up here, I then did that job. I did Crivellaro's, I did the old --

RS: Crivellaro's?

ANON: Yeah, I did that building. Built that dome in the front, built a domed roof and all that crap. And, anyway, shortly after that, after I did Heritage Lanes, this guy come after me to -- it was Glencross Corporation this guy owned, okay. You've heard of them?

RS: I've heard of him, yeah, sure.

ANON: He asked me to get that started, to help get it going. I bailed him out of a mess in '79, I helped him out of a mess -- no, I helped him out of a mess right after my financial condition. [01:13:00] He got into problems and I finished

a government project for him. I made it work and I finished it.

RS: That's a great ceiling.

ANON: Huh? Yeah, I built them beams, yeah.

RS: Yeah, boy, that's --

ANON: I had a couple guys working. I had an old timer that worked here -- used to work for my dad. And then, I had a few other guys, and they were all pretty good boys. I had [Milt Williamson?], I don't know if you've ever heard of him or not. Worked for Eisenhart.

RS: Anyway, where's it going?

ANON: Where's it going? That's a good question. That's a real, real good question. I see much more mass-produced things, I see panelization, I see [01:14:00] modulars coming in. Technology, I don't know where it's going. I really -- I think in the ten-year future I don't think you're going to see that much custom building.

RS: Assemblers, that's all, like the guy that showed up and put that thing together down the street there.

ANON: That's right. That's basically what I think you're going to have. So, a guy like me that you know, that really worked at it all his life and learned this business, either I got to get into some real, real specialty stuff, if there's enough people around, or get into the right part of

the country to do it, because this is not the area to do something like this.

RS: Oh my God, no, the details (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

ANON: We made that stuff. I mean, it was no --

RS: Just don't see it anymore.

ANON: That's right. [01:15:00] That's an eight-inch wall and I built those pocket doors. Now I didn't buy anything to do it, all I did was bought some barndoor track and--

RS: Put that on, I was just going to say that -- that's unusual today, you don't see that much.

ANON: That's right. Oh man, we did some real -- there were some painters that were working down there for me, had this one in particular. He was half-decent. He wasn't too bad. Al Miller was his name. And he said to me, one day he said, "You know what? I've been at this for thirty years," he says, "Painting. I've never, I've never seen anything like this." A lot of guys tell me we built those curved roofs in the back--

RS: You did the buildings -- you did the shelves.

ANON: Yeah, I did that, myself, personally, I did that.

RS: (laughs) I'm really curious how much [01:16:00] did this job cost.

ANON: That cost eight hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

RS: I'm not surprised. I'm not surprised.

ANON: He had me on the payroll doing that.

RS: I'm sure. Sure. Still, that's a house.

ANON: I helped him start Glenncross Corporation, and I built eight federally-funded projects for him, and then he wanted to build this. And he put me there to build that thing, and after I was all done, I was done.

RS: You were done. That was enough.

ANON: Yeah, that was the end of me.

RS: This is incredible, really beautiful. Wow.

ANON: Huh?

RS: Just don't see this stuff anymore.

ANON: No. Uh-huh.

RS: Don't see it. Still see it in Europe, but not here.

ANON: See that back porch? See that porch?

RS: Yeah, I know. That's beautiful. That's magnificent.

ANON: I laid that thing out, and I told Walt Eicher, I don't know if you've ever heard of a guy by the name of Walt Eicher. I said, "Walt, you cut this, you cut that, you cut this, [01:17:00] and you put it together." I assembled it outside, but he cut the pieces for me inside.

RS: That's really beautiful.

ANON: Isn't it? I mean, he said he couldn't get over the fact that in ten minutes' time I drew a little sketch of what I

was doing -- I always made a pattern of what I was doing, you know, I laid it out on a piece of plywood or something, and then started putting it together.

RS: That's a beauty.

ANON: Isn't it?

RS: That's beautiful, Jesus. Yeah, don't see many like this anymore.

ANON: Did you see the railing on the upper porch?

RS: Mm-hmm. That's gorgeous.

ANON: I want to tell you something. Put that all together, that was piece by piece, all together, had it all in -- that was a hot roof, or that was a rubber roof on top of that porch. And then I built what they call duck boards. The roof had a little pitch to it, and then I built duck boards to level the roof out so he could go out there and sit [01:18:00] -- he could walk out to the upstairs and sit on that roof. You know, your elevation change allows you to be bug-free. You know that? You get to a certain height, the bugs don't bother you. I had that all in, all done, all fitted together. It took a lot of time to fit that together. Jesus Christ, he comes out the doors one day and he says to me, "Raise that up two inches." The railing. Wow.

RS: (laughs)

ANON: You wanted to see a stunt, and a trick. I mean, it'd still hold it together, from coming apart. Once you raise that up, what I did was loosen up all the nails on the post. I took one of these, remember these old things that they used to move railroad cars with, you put that underneath and just hoisted it up little by little. But it come apart [01:19:00] and then to pull it back together, it was a, that's a --

RS: That's a nice touch, the railing around the pillars like that. I never saw that.

ANON: Oh, that was just one of my ideas, one of my little unique ideas. See that little porch above the door? That's suspended.

RS: I noticed.

ANON: Yeah, I made that piece by piece too.

RS: Yeah, this is a beauty.

ANON: But that's -- see, Rich --

RS: Yeah, there's the roof.

ANON: There's the railing. We had to raise that damn thing up. I mean it was at the right height and everything. See, there was a set code of ethics that railings -- you know, a straight one at a certain height, going up the slope were a certain height, and this is all I know. That's the way they are. But, Jesus.

RS: Kind of wood did you use?

ANON: A lot of that -- [01:20:00] some of it was fir, and a lot of it was pine. But it was a good grade of pine.

RS: Oh yeah, I'm sure it was.

ANON: So, a lot of it was -- they call it sugar pine. And the panels --

RS: That screened-in porch, there.

ANON: We made those screens. I made those in one unit. And I had these old -- I had a set of old spring-loaded catches around here that had the buttons that you could pull in. I put four of them in each one of those screens, you could take them out in winter and store 'em, and put them back in, and then, yep.

RS: Oh, wow, that staircase is nice.

ANON: That, we made piece by piece. You get to the stairway, that's the first you saw that? You should see the details on that stairway. You can't believe that stairway. I laid that [01:21:00] out on the floor -- that goes from the first floor to the third floor.

RS: Third floor. It's circular all the way up.

ANON: All the way up.

RS: Oh yeah, yeah, I see that.

ANON: You see how it's roughed out? Rich, when I first cut the stair horses downstairs, I laid them out. I didn't do it

for a while, and I forgot a little bit. And I made a mistake or two, okay, on laying out the stair horses. But then, after I got oriented again -- see once you get away from it for a while you forget about it. But I won't anymore.

RS: This is some house.

ANON: Yes.

RS: Beautiful.

ANON: Oh, I heard he's going to lose it.

RS: Oh, yeah?

ANON: Yeah. That's what I heard, don't know how true it is.

Yeah, look at that.

RS: Oh, that'd be too bad.

ANON: That's suspended.

RS: That is.

ANON: Somebody asked me if I [01:22:00] could suspend that out in the open and I said sure, that's very simple to do that.

A lot of people come around and looked at this.

RS: They may lose it?

ANON: And he may lose it. If you ever go through -- I'll tell you what you do.

RS: Where's it located?

ANON: Okay, you go -- you know where --

RS: I like that.

ANON: That's the stairway, looking at it from the foyer up through. Everything is bent, handmade there (voices overlapping; inaudible). We bent the rail. They were laminated -- they're in pieces, they're about three-eighths thick. What you do, you build the stairway in position. You make it. And once you get the steps all in and the risers and treads and stringers on, then you fasten blocks on the steps. And you just glue the -- see it don't matter if the railing's down on the steps or up here, it's still the same-- [01:23:00]

RS: Same curve.

ANON: That's right. Same curve. So, what you do is you glue it together right on the steps. I have blocks in fact, I have them out here in a barn if I ever get into another one. I have special blocks made that holds it -- pulls it together and holds it right in the right position -- that all you do is take it and raise it up. That's all. But you know how many people would know how to do that today? Not too many.

RS: (laughs) Not too many is right. Yeah, this is some place. Jesus.

ANON: But Rich, a good question is where's this heading to, you know? I hate to see it. I'm glad -- if I do get good enough to work again, I'm glad I don't have to work at it too much longer to survive here. I just -- I really don't

want to see where it's going. Because I, the things --
[01:24:00] I do keep myself occupied a little bit by going
around and looking at things. The more I see things, I
just get so upset, and it seems like the older I get the
worse I get. And when I went to work for Sherman, I
learned the mass production end of this deal. And when I
was working for my father, I learned the precision end of
it. So, there for a while, you know, I closed my eyes a
little bit to some things when I worked for Sherman because
it was a different ball game. Even though, he didn't build
a bad home, don't get me wrong.

RS: Well, he had a pretty good reputation.

ANON: That's right, that's right. And I really built the
reputation for him, to be honest with you.

RS: In fact, I almost bought one of his houses back when I
first came to Easton. Out in Palmer.

ANON: Did you? [Old?] Orchard?

RS: Yeah.

ANON: You probably talked to me then maybe, Rich.

RS: I don't know, [01:25:00] maybe it was.

ANON: What year?

RS: Would've been about, '73?

ANON: Yeah, you probably talked to me. You probably talked to me. Because I used to sell them and all, put the contracts together and everything.

RS: I probably did. Because I remember I looked at a couple out there. The far end, you know, by the river.

ANON: Okay, by old [Jay Dan?].

RS: Right, that was where he was at that time. He was building down through there.

ANON: Right, okay. Yeah, was with him until '78. I'd still be with him today if it wouldn't have been for one thing.

RS: Yeah, this is a really great house, Jesus.

ANON: Yeah that was some piece of work to put together, Rich.

We had [Sammy Hank?] with a machine set those columns. And they come through with the -- they were not wrapped, they had [01:26:00] strips. And then they had wires run around to hold the strips against the pole, and then he mounted this to his bucket of his 955 front-end loader and he raised them right up in place. But, if you ever want to see this place, you go down at -- not at Jutland -- go down to the next exit where Johnny's Truck Stop is and get off at that exit and go down 173. You go down -- now I guess it's called the station break -- okay, when you hit the station -- it used to be called Union Gap. Make a left there, you go by a bank, and you come to a T in the road.

They build a lot of condos on the right there, okay. Make a right-hand turn there and go down and you can't miss it. It has brick, [01:27:00] all the way across the front with gates -- I don't think he ever put the gates up. But the brick walls there, okay? I built the house, got the house all done -- and I wasn't there anymore. They started the garage. He had the guy out in the project, running the project for him -- it was a friend of his. Anyway, they started the garage. Okay, they built a three-car garage. I had to foundation it, okay, then he got it framed up. Well, that thing has a lot of fancy detail [on the porch?] He brought guys down there, they didn't know where to begin. They really didn't -- that goes to show you. They didn't know where to begin to do that, even though they saw it on the house, they just couldn't [01:28:00] figure out how it was all done. He did ask me, he called me up and said "Would you do me a favor?". I did. I did it for him. I come down and show these guys...

RS: How to do it.

ANON: Yeah. So that's a good example of what's happening today. And, I don't know where, Rich, I don't know where this is going. I know in the plumbing industry -- I know in the stonemasons alone, I haven't seen anybody to replace the Ramuni's and I knew another guy in Bethlehem -- boy, I mean

these old Italians used to come to work and I mean, these guys were stonemasons. You'd see a pile of stone laying out there that you would shove over a bank. By the time they got cutting that, and refacing [01:29:00] that stone and had their bottle of wine and had their little Italian bread and maybe a little pepperoni or whatever they had -- I want to tell you something, when they got done with that stone and what they got accomplished in one day was quite something. It was constant work and measuring and precision. I mean, it's gone. It's not even near anymore.

RS: Well, that's it, you wonder --

ANON: And the plastering -- we used to plaster houses, okay?

When the plaster went out, and this sheet rock garbage come in, okay, that's another art that's gone. And I'll tell you, those plastered houses were good. They were good, they were warm, they had strength, they had body to them, and you didn't have nail pops, you didn't have any of this crap [01:30:00]. You know, the problems we've got today. I mean the good block layers, they're not even around anymore. I mean really, the guys that I remember, Wayne [Tick?] over in Wilson Borough. Christ, that guy was a master at block laying. I mean, when he put up a block, you had uniform mortar joints. You could look at that thing and you could see it, that every block was kind of -- it

looked like a picture, drawn on the wall, instead of this way, and this way and you know, and it's so much different. Plumbers, Christ, the guys that used to do plumbing, I mean, when they measured for a toilet and when they run water lines, I mean, they run hot and cold and they--

RS: Where they were supposed to be.

ANON: Yeah, where they were supposed to be. Even what they did, when they run, you know [01:31:00] -- they used cast iron and they used a solder and they used -- they melded the lead to put the joints together and put gum in there -- you didn't have trouble with them joints. And when they run the sewer line it was nice and straight. And when they run the water lines it was beautiful. And when they used to use duct work, I mean, it was beautiful. It was run through -- now they did do a little improving on the heating of today, they did.

RS: Oh yeah, well, the technology's better.

ANON: The technology today is better than what they did years ago on heating. I will say that. Better, but --

RS: Don't try to get it repaired.

ANON: (laughs) Yeah.

RS: (laughs) That's another matter.

ANON: The problem today though is, years ago, when you put a hot air system in, I mean, the amount of cold air you put into

the room, you had a cold air return [01:32:00] there to take the same amount of warm air or whatever it was out of that room. That's one of the things today -- they got the technology but they're cutting down on the way they put the duct work in. And they've gone to this fiberglass duct, which is -- I can't stand looking at it. You know, it has the fiberglass film on the inside.

RS: No, I haven't seen it, actually.

ANON: Yeah, they have fiberglass duct out. But I will say, the heating industry did make some improvements, and the insulation. But other than that, anything else -- the aluminum siding, gone from the aluminum siding to the vinyl siding. I mean, it even cheapens -- even though I build a lot of houses with that stuff on -- it just cheapens the houses right up. You look at a house with a [01:33:00] wood siding versus a vinyl -- there's no comparisons. And Christ, even today finding somebody that knows how to put wood siding on. I mean, to do it and do it right. You know, we did that, we're carpenters. But today, they seem to specialize in everything. And then guys that -- and then putty and caulking. I never saw putty and caulking with putty nails. But not the way they do today. Jesus Christ, they got putty from three-eighths --- I mean, they're caulking from three-eighths to an inch and a half,

some of the stuff they do today. It's a different ball game out there, Rich, it's just a completely different ball game. It's the greed, it's the attitude, it's "How fast can I get it done?", "How much money can I make?", and I myself personally can't stand it. [01:34:00] It stinks and maybe I'm too old-fashioned, but I just think there's just nothing that smells good about the whole situation. There's a good example right up the street here. There's two of them. They raised the roof down here and they raised the roof up here on this house. Do you see it up here?

RS: Which one?

ANON: It's right next to -- two doors up from the old guy right across from me here.

RS: Oh, well, I saw trucks there the other -- a few weeks ago.

ANON: Yeah, they raised the roof on that house. They raised the roof on the one down here in the corner too.

RS: Yeah, I remember that.

ANON: Remember that? Them guys didn't know what they were doing. They just didn't know what they're doing. They ripped the whole roof of that house off before they did anything. You don't raise a roof like that. They did the same thing up here, they ripped everything off and threw it out in the front yard [01:35:00], all the wood, and all

that wood, the God darned wood that they threw on the front yard was much better than the wood they were using!

[INTERRUPTION]

ANON: Again Rich, I just don't know where this is going -- I don't have a good solid answer for where it's going. I really don't.

RS: Quality is what everybody's talking about in terms of our competitiveness in the world, our economic competitiveness, and yet quality seems to be disappearing all over the place. I mean, management is a disaster.

ANON: And the reason -- and I think, and I contribute all that to strictly people not knowing what they're doing. I contribute that to our new attitude of we're pushing, pushing and pushing for higher education instead of letting people come [01:36:00] from the bottom of the ladder and working their way up the ladder. It's been a proven fact with so many different people I even talk to.

RS: Well, yeah, it's the attitude of the fast buck.

ANON: Yeah, right.

RS: Quick in and out, speculation. Of course, a lot of that's been part of the culture for the last dozen years or so. This has been the attitude that people have.

ANON: That's right. The attitude that--

RS: Rather than work.

ANON: -- the greed. That's right. Everybody wants to do nothing to earn money.

RS: Instead of building something, you speculate.

ANON: Yeah, right. That's right.

RS: And this has been true of virtually every industry.

ANON: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, I'm not sure I know what an answer is either.

ANON: I know we don't have the proper people to train. We just don't have -- we have to -- in order to do that, [01:37:00] we have to do how this country originally started out, bring the foreigners over here (overlapping dialogue; inaudible) develop, that's right. That's right. Or the Austrians are very good. I mean, when they build over there, they build -- it lasts six, seven, eight hundred years.

RS: I have a friend in Germany, lives outside of Munich and he, oh, about, seven, eight years ago, built a new house. At that time, I had just bought a house from Panuccio which he --

ANON: Panuccio knows --

RS: Yeah, he knows what he's doing. Back in '82 during the recession, he hadn't finished it. He'd framed it out and everything and I told him I'll buy it if I design the

interior -- I want it changed inside. And he agreed, and he did a nice job. [01:38:00]

ANON: No, Panuccio -- I forgot about him. He knows what he's doing. (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)

RS: Yeah, Rocky. It was Rocky. But I look at this friend of mine's house in Munich and mine, and he saw it too, he saw both of them too (laughs).

ANON: World of difference.

RS: His house is gonna last for three centuries for God's sake. Forks Township is going to last maybe 75 years.

ANON: No, he's right. My dad used to comment about that. You know what, my dad used to -- a couple things he used to comment about, and there's a couple things I noticed. At the time, I didn't realize because I was too young to realize what he was talking about, but he used to say -- every once in a while, he'd say this, "We just don't know how to build over here." And now I know what he's talking about. And the number two thing that used to really, really get to him and used to -- oh my God, [01:39:00] he used to get aggravated -- is an architect or an engineer that did some kind of design -- I remember, and it was Jason's father, I remember we built a home for Herb Fishbone.

RS: I know Herb well.

ANON: Do you? You know Herb?

RS: Sure.

ANON: We built a home for him--

RS: Up on the hill.

ANON: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, I know the house.

ANON: Oh, do you? Okay, well anyway, my dad said to me one day, he said, you know what, they had a screened in porch on one end of it -- maybe it's closed by now, it could've been all closed in, but that time, if I remember, it was just an open screened in porch. And he wanted to build this thing, and with no ceiling or nothing to hold anything together. My dad said to him, "This is just not going to work." Goddamn if it didn't, [01:40:00] I mean, it just didn't work. But he insisted on having it like that. And I know a lot of plans he used to look at. He said, "These guys don't know what they're doing." They draw something up, he said, "That don't work." And I remember him saying this so many times, and he'd go down and then he'd try to correct these guys and these guys, you know, they thought they knew what the hell they were talking about, but they didn't. I knew that used to get to him. And then every once in a while, he'd say, "We don't know how to build over here."

RS: When did he die?

ANON: You know what, he died in '80. When I was having all my difficulty and I was just about down to the bottom --

RS: He died then.

ANON: He died then. In '83 I think it was. But he did a lot of work for a lot of prominent people around here.

RS: What did he think about the change in--?

ANON: Oh, he retired in '70. [01:41:00] And he was in a different world. He didn't -- well, yes he did, he saw what was going on.

RS: He must've seen what was going on.

ANON: Yeah, he saw what was going on. But, he just--

RS: Didn't want anything to do with it.

ANON: -- just didn't want anything to do with it. We built all those Sherman apartments over there, remember. Remember those, the Robin Hood, Maiden Marion, and all them. Well, that's where I was born and raised. That land there -- see that road, Green Wood didn't go through there at that time--

RS: Yeah, I know Green Wood didn't go through there.

ANON: -- and they cut it through at a later date. My dad could've bought all of that land for four hundred bucks, and he had the money to do it, and Tom Sherman paid thirty thousand for it. And when Tom told me one day he bought that land for thirty thousand, I couldn't believe it. But

anyway, he utilized it properly. But we were over there building the apartments, and you know, [01:42:00] they have curved roofs on it.

RS: I noticed, yeah.

ANON: Well, that's a little stunt in itself to lay out the curve and the curved hips. And the compound curves coming into that, and I laid that all out. I mean, he didn't have -- there's nobody else that knew how to do it, but Jesus Christ, I come to this one corner of the first building that we put up. I had the hips all laid out and everything, and then the porches come off on an angle and then the curve run into it. Well I want to tell you something, do you ever run across something that you all of a sudden, you just couldn't think anymore?

RS: (laughs) That happens a lot more and more.

ANON: I got stopped with that and there was a guy out here, a painter, I'll never forget it, he says to me, "Why don't you go over and get your dad?" He was retired. I brought him over, Jesus Christ, he says to me, "[name redacted]," he says, "Jesus, [01:43:00] that's simple." You know I could've kicked myself in the ass ten times over after he come over and showed me, it really was.

RS: So simple you didn't think of it.

ANON: Yeah, didn't even think about it. But, he said to me, "Hey, that's the way these guys are putting in patio doors?" I says, "Pop, that's the way they're making them anymore." He was so -- he looked at the patio doors that were put in, with the sills and the way they were being put in, and it was the way they were making them, to be honest with you. Boy, he just shook his head. But he just worked with precision. So, you know Herb Fishbone good, huh?

RS: Mm-hmm.

ANON: Yeah.

RS: Okay, well.

ANON: We built Dick Warren's house.

RS: Did you?

ANON: Yeah. The Old Manhattan, the Forks Valley Inn.

[01:44:00]

RS: That's good. That Manhattan was a classic, I remember it was on its last legs when I moved to Easton, but--

ANON: Oh, it was a beauty.

RS: It was a beautiful place. I used to go in there just to look at the place.

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